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Note from the Chief Editors

Otis Bakker and Benjamin Woolfe

Welcome to another edition of Juncture, the University of Manchester's undergraduate politics journal.

Since its founding in 2017, Juncture has been dedicated to showcasing the intellectual rigour and originality of work produced by students at the University. Volume 9 Issue 2 proudly continues that tradition, bringing together a diverse collection of thought-provoking essays. It covers topics ranging from the racialised policing of Black cultural expression through UK drill music, to the gendered consequences of nuclear testing in Kazakhstan, to the question of whether Donald Trump's actions have increased Chinese influence in the Asia-Pacific region. What unites these pieces is not a shared method or theoretical tradition, but a commitment to asking difficult questions of the world as it is. We hope these essays not only inform, but also inspire further debate and critical reflection amongst our readers.

As always, the publication of Juncture would not be possible without the hard work of those around us. A huge thank you to Meera Vinesh, Juncture's General Secretary, who has played an invaluable role in coordinating the

team, running our social media channels and formatting both of this year's publications. Alongside Meera, the Editorial Board has helped us to filter through submissions and maintain high editorial standards. In this regard we would like to thank Charlie Sanigar, Elin Hywel, Laurence Young, Lola Lesnick, Rakay Akhtar, and Imogen Lightning. We further extend our gratitude to the School of Social Sciences, who provide us with the necessary funding to make our publications freely available to all online.

On a more personal note, this issue marks the end of our tenure as Editors-in-Chief of Juncture. Over the past year, we have had the privilege of overseeing a period of renewal for the journal: recruiting an entirely new Editorial Board, restoring our biannual publication schedule, and launching a new series of podcast interviews with Juncture authors, the first of which will be released in the near future. Whilst we are both now heading overseas to continue our studies at different institutions, we are nonetheless excited to watch the journal go from strength to strength in the future under the capable leadership of Meera Vinesh.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Juncture.

Otis Bakker and Benjamin Woolfe
Chief Editors

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British Politics

(Image credits: Reuters/Hannah McKay)

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Making Crimes Out Of Rhymes: UK Drill and The Racialised Governance of Black Cultural Expression in Post-Windrush Britain

Gabriella Bromfield, 3rd Essay

BA Politics and Philosophy

Abstract

The criminalisation of UK drill music marks a qualitative shift in the policing of Black British cultural expression: lyrics are being admitted as criminal evidence and performances constitute grounds for prison sentences, despite no empirical link between drill and violent crime. This article asks what drill's systematic criminalisation, conducted without evidential basis, reveals about racialised governance of Black cultural expression in post-Windrush Britain. It contributes to debates on race, citizenship, and cultural censorship in contemporary Britain. Through Critical Discourse Studies and genealogical method, it traces a sonic lineage from early Jamaican sound systems to drill, arguing that drill's policing constitutes a juridical criminalisation sustained through a systematic omission of racial language. It concludes that drill has functioned as a scapegoat, and develops the *apparent citizenship contradiction*, an original concept naming the coexistence of formal legal equality and racialised governance, as the mechanism through which institutional discrimination is rendered deniable.

Introduction

"I don't think it's possible to understand…the policing of Black or Afro-diasporic music genres, whether we're talking about UK drill today or…other music's of the African diaspora…as separate from the history of policing and police racism itself, and indeed criminal injustice" (Fatsis, 2026, 03:28).

Drill is a rap music genre that originated in Chicago in the early 2010s, distinct from other hip-hop forms in its combative energy, preoccupation with gang-conflict and frank portrayal of urban life (Davies, 2021). The genre crossed the Atlantic soon after its inception and as UK drill artist Loski noted "Chicago's drill music had a big influence…people in Brixton started doing it" (Apple Music, 2020). UK drill, hereafter referred to as simply 'drill', will be the focus of this research. In 2018, drill artists AM and Skengdo became the first in British legal history to receive a prison sentence for performing a song, simply titled 'Attempted 1.0' (Hancox, 2019). The fact that the performance of a song could amount to grounds for incarceration marks a qualitative shift in how drill music is being policed. UCL's Department of Security and Crime concluded that there is 'no meaningful relationship between drill music and real-life violence when compared to three kinds of police-recorded violent crime data in London' (Kleinberg and McFarlane, 2020 in Oliver, 2023, p.9), and the most extensive review of cases in which rap music has been used as evidence itself concedes that 'this topic urgently needs scrutiny and data' (Quinn et al., 2024, p.5). This research responds to that necessity by moving beyond what quantitative data alone can offer.

Drill music has notably violent lyricism. In the absence of evidential basis for a causal relationship; however, drill has been institutionally constructed as directly criminogenic and resultantly, many drill artists continue to be prosecuted on this basis. The political question this article asks is, what does the systematic criminalisation of drill music as a Black British cultural expression, conducted without evidential grounds, reveal about the racialised governance of Black cultural expression in Britain today?

The growing body of academic research about the policing of drill has addressed the inseparability of Black cultural expression and institutional racism, with key authors such as Lambros Fatsis (2019; 2023) tracing this lineage back to the colonial era. This project takes inspiration from that scholarship but chooses to trace the genealogy from an intentionally different starting point, beginning with the post-Windrush era's police raids of the 1960s, through the racialised administrative criteria of Form 696, to today's gang injunctions and prosecutorial practices that govern drill. These represent intensifications of the same racialised rationale that positions Black British cultural expressions as societal threat. Moreover, this pattern runs through Black British music's sonic genealogy. Grime, like drill (often named its successor), has been subject to numerous forms of policing (Sanghavi, 2025), and grime's sonic genealogy traces back to the Jamaican sound systems and dances Windrush migrants brought with them to Britain (White, 2020). As Oliver describes drill's 'bounce, foreboding feel and deliciously distorted sound design… [is] Jamaican-influenced British grit a la grime…' (2023, p.4). The post-Windrush period is therefore an analytically pertinent frame, not because every drill artist is of Caribbean heritage, but because drill's cultural and sonic lineage trace directly back to the Jamaican sound systems brought by Commonwealth migrants. This is not a study of whether drill causes crime, rather it is an addition of vital and critical research to the field, on how drill has been constructed as criminogenic and what that reveals about racialised governance of Black cultural expression in Britain.

Furthermore, juridical criminalisation and the *apparent citizenship contradiction* are two concepts central to this research. Juridical criminalisation is understood as the qualitative shift by which the discursive construction of drill as a social threat becomes inscribed into legal apparatuses, so that rap lyrics are admitted as criminal evidence and performances constitute grounds for incarceration. Drill's juridical criminalisation is representative of a racialised cultural governance, defined in this research as a compound analytical concept drawing on Stuart Hall's (1997) theorisation of how institutions produce racialised categories through discourse, Paul Gilroy's (1987) argument that the state positions

Black culture as incompatible with British national identity, and Lambros Fatsis's (2019) concept of racial neoliberalism. This captures the state's use of administrative, legal and discursive mechanisms to monitor, restrict and criminalise Black cultural expression through neutral-sounding procedures that encode racial criteria rather than explicit racial language. From 1948 onwards, Commonwealth citizens arrived as British subjects entitled to formal legal equality, yet as Gilroy (1987) emphasises, Black Britons were simultaneously positioned as incompatible with British nationhood. This tension distinguishes the post-Windrush period analytically from the colonial era, where racialised governance operated within the openly racialised logic of empire and did not require procedural concealment. This article develops the *apparent citizenship contradiction*, to name the coexistence of formal legal equality and racialised cultural governance through which the policing of drill is practised whilst remaining institutionally deniable.

To analyse this process, this project adopts Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and genealogical method, conducting an in-depth analysis across five primary sources: the AM and Skengdo gang injunction, Serious Violence Strategy (2018), Mayor's Question Time exchanges, Krept and Konan's *Ban Drill*, and Drillminister's *Political Drillin*.

Literature Review

This chapter will first analyse the existing scholarship on the policing of drill music in a wider context of the governance of Black cultural expression in Britain. Then, it considers the emerging scholarship on the policing of drill, evaluating literature surrounding cultural censorship, legislation and restrictive policing practices (Fatsis, 2019; Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 1997) that this research asserts to position drill as the latest, intensified iteration of racialised cultural governance.

Policing Black Cultural Expression in Britain

The years following the 1948 migration of the Windrush generation were marked by a profound racial paradox: Commonwealth migrants were actively encouraged to migrate to Britain to aid post-war labour shortages yet were met with considerable racial hostility upon arrival (White, 2020; McGraw, 2018). In response to this exclusion, the Black British community recreated cultural traditions as a way of ameliorating their new life in Britain, and Caribbean migrants brought their reggae sound system culture, house parties and dances to British urban life (Sanghavi, 2025; Ward, 2018; McGraw, 2018). These events enabled Black British citizens to create spaces of social refuge, belonging and cultural continuity with a racialised social environment (Back 1988; Ward, 2018).

However, as these events of Black cultural expression became increasingly prevalent in British cities, the institutional response and narratives began to progressively reframe their practices as spaces of disorder and potential social threat rather than as simply entertainment. In the early 1960s, British police embarked on regular raids of so-called 'typical West Indian parties' commonly referred to as 'shebeens' (McGraw, 2018, p.368); they were frequently subject to routine police surveillance and intervention under provisions like the Licensing Act 1953 that was able to penalise alleged breaches of unlicensed alcohol sales (Ward 2018; McGraw, 2018). Under the guise of upholding legislation for illegal alcohol sales and noise complaints, patrolmen were able to justify arrests for those merely entering and exiting the shebeens (McGraw, 2018). This exemplifies the deeper prejudice Black British migrants faced, revealing racialised assumptions that positioned their cultural norms as inherently suspect and disorderly.

Moving on to theorists of race and representation will facilitate further depth of understanding how such assumptions came to be embedded within institutional practices. The influential work of Stuart Hall explains that culture permeates all aspects of social life and meaning is produced through systems of representation that shape how people, practices, and identities are understood in society (Hall, 1997). These meanings are not neutral, they inform the social norms, rules, and conventions that dictate how society is ordered and governed (Hall, 1997). For these meanings to be mobilised, language and discourse are instrumental mechanisms through which meaning can be produced, circulated, and maintained in society, so institutions seeking power and governance over the public make use of these key mechanisms to regulate and control (Hall, 1997). When we apply this to the context of Black British music, Hall's framework begins to illustrate how Black cultural expression has been historically constructed through institutional discourse as inherently criminogenic and as a result, in need of regulation.

This portrayal of Black gatherings as sites of social disorder and potential violence therefore should be understood as indicative of the processes through which cultural practices come to be framed as socially threatening. Rather than assuming the significant policing of Black gatherings reflected a reality of anti-social behaviour at the time, this research encourages the reader to consider why these spaces associated with Black cultural expression have been repeatedly interpreted through institutional frameworks of suspicion and disorder.

Constructing Black Cultural Expression as Threat

Having established how early Black cultural gatherings in Britain were subject to policing and institutional suspicion, this section examines why such interpretations emerged and how meanings are produced and circulated. This requires engagement with broader theoretical perspectives on culture, representation, and moral panic. We can trace the sonic genealogy of grime and drill back to the sound system traditions and musical practices introduced by the Caribbean migrants (White, 2020; McGraw, 2018; Sanghavi, 2025). These Black British genres are cultural productions that have been repeatedly interpreted through narratives of deviance and criminality. What follows seeks to explain how Black cultural expression through music becomes criminalised through racialised narratives that frame cultural forms as socially threatening and shape hostile institutional responses.

Many scholars of cultural studies, like Gilroy (1987), have continually argued that the production of culture operates at the intersection of lived experiences and broader societal structures. In his eminent book *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack,* he conceptualises culture as the social sphere through which everyday lived experiences become articulated within, and shaped by, the systematic structures of power (Gilroy, 1987). The lived experiences of residents of social housing in grime lyrics work to curate a sense of belonging that inspires the artists and resonates with the listeners (White, 2020). Gilroy credits Hall's influential work describing the role of meanings in informing societal norms and order through developing his own theorisations that whilst culture is expressive, it has important material consequences: 'meanings are sources of the individual and collective actions which give culture its materiality' (Gilroy, 1987, p.17). Together these scholars aid this research in explaining why grime and drill are reflections of the Black British lived experience, and cultural productions that actively interact with structural forces of race, class and institutional power.

This is captured starkly by Gilroy (1987, p.60) as he notes that Black cultures have been framed as 'alien' introductions into Britain, with British nationhood and national cultures positioned as something incompatible with the possibility of authentically accommodating Black Brits and their cultural expression. This is articulated by Oliver (1990) as a discursive assumption that Black music is outside of the traditional, conservative understanding of Britain being fundamentally White because it is made by migrants who are inseparable from their 'Blackness'. This assumption exemplifies why the shebeens and cultural expressions of the first-generation Windrush migrants were targeted as outside of the (fundamentally white) British social order. It is from this understanding of racialised perceptions of Black cultural forms that this research seeks to interpret and challenge the intensification of policing drill music today.

The Juridical Turn

The preceding sections have established that Black sound in Britain has been subject to racialised governance since the significant influx of Black migrants post-Windrush, mobilised through informal suspicion, licensing legislation and institutional narratives of disorder. Next, this section analyses emerging scholarship on the policing of drill music to reveal that this racialised governance is not only continuous, but has undergone a qualitative transformation as the policing of drill demonstrates that musical expression has itself become an object of jurisdiction, regulated as beyond culturally suspect, and to be in fact legally criminalising.

Emerging from the inner-city communities of South London in the early 2010s, drill music gives unfiltered expression to the lived realities of urban poverty, gang violence and social exclusion (Sanghavi, 2025; Fatsis, 2019). However, instead of being perceived as a cultural form rooted in this socioeconomic deprivation, the genre has been institutionally framed as a catalyst for violent crime. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick, the Met's gang-crime chief Commander Jim Stokley and the government's Home Office were unanimous in characterising drill as a genre that 'glamorise[s] gang or drug-selling life, taunt[s] rivals and normalise[s] weapons carrying' (HM Government, 2018, cited in Fatsis, 2019). This concerning government characterisation manifests in other ways, for example via the 2021 Policy Exchange Report describing drill as a 'call to violence' (Falkner, 2021, p. 53), allowing such claims to be circulated with an air of legitimacy despite the omission of strong empirical evidence to establish the supposed causal relationship between drill music and criminal behaviour; an open letter signed by forty-nine experts contested the report as 'factually inaccurate, misleading and politically dangerous' (Sanghavi, 2025, p.193). Hall (1997) describes that societal interpretations of cultural forms derive from the collective vocabularies which have already absorbed racialised meanings, revealing the logic from which racialised discursive practices are derived. This means Black British cultural expressions, from sound systems to grime events to drill tracks, can be pre-emptively interpreted through an institutional lens already primed for suspicion.

However, the critical distinction between the policing of drill and earlier sounds in this genealogy is the intensity of institutional suspicion that became operationalised through specific legal mechanisms. Between 2015 and 2019, Operation Domain was enacted to facilitate systematic requests to remove drill music videos from social media platforms and other streaming services (Sanghavi, 2025). More recently, from June 2021 to May 2022, every Metropolitan Police request to remove music videos targeted drill, with almost 87 percent effectively withdrawn (ibid). A landmark moment, analysed later in detail, occurred in 2018 when drill artists AM and Skengdo (Terrell Doley and Joshua Malinga) were issued a nine-month prison sentence for performing a song. This was the first time the performance of a song itself was treated as a breach of a gang injunction (Sanghavi, 2025; Fatsis, 2019). 65 signatories from human rights organisations, musicians, academics and lawyers critiqued the sentence as an affront to civil liberties, noting that few renowned music artists could survive such limitations (Fatsis, 2019). This legislative restriction of AM and Skengdo's performance is a pertinent indication of the juridical turn in policing drill music, and a salient moment demonstrating that the music itself had become illicit, and sufficient evidence according to the British government's positioning of criminality.

Building on this, an important ally in the existing literature is Quinn et al.'s (2024) quantitative review of cases involving rap music evidence whose findings reveal the racial disproportionality of a prosecutorial pattern criminalising Black sound. Examining 68 cases involving 252 defendants where rap videos and lyrics were consistently used as evidence for gang affiliation without sufficient regulation or monitoring of how such evidence was employed, it found that two thirds were Black and 80 percent had more than one defendant (Quinn et al., 2024). More recent research found a threefold increase in the yearly rate of appeal cases involving rap and drill evidence between 2005-2018 and 2019-2025 (Taylor, 2025), which provides supporting evidence of an accelerating pattern of racialised governance. Moreover, the apparatus through which drill policing has faced a juridical turn has expanded and intensified, initiating active legislative debate: at the start of this year Baroness Chakrabarti, supported by Baroness Doreen Lawrence, tabled an amendment to the Victims and Courts Bill and sought to restrict the government's admissibility of artistic expression as criminal evidence (UK Parliament, 2026). However, it was not moved to a vote leaving the discriminatory law unchanged (ibid). The dismissal of this attempt to reform the legislation speaks to the scale of the intensification of the institutional shift.

The most substantiated theoretical account is offered by Fatsis (2019) who argues that drill's criminalisation constitutes a form of racial neoliberalism in which the state repositions responsibility for the socioeconomic conditions onto the cultural expressions of those who inhabit it. Instead of confronting the structural inequalities detailed in drill lyrics, the neoliberal state criminalises the depictions themselves, articulating drill artists as 'Black folk devils' (Cohen, 1972; Hall et al., 1978; Williams, 2014) whose cultural expressions threaten societal order and public safety (Fatsis, 2019). This is potent analytical work that this research builds directly upon, though it has limitations. Racial neoliberalism explains the ideological logic of drill's criminalisation but does not fully consider the discursive mechanisms through which that logic becomes institutionalised. Therefore, this research makes a complementary yet individual argument that the policing of drill reflects racial neoliberal ideologies whilst representing a juridical crystallisation of the longer genealogy this chapter has traced. Having arrived at today's manifestation of the racialised governance of Black sound, it is evident that drill has become embedded in law, precedent, and prosecutorial practice in qualitatively new ways.

Theoretical Framework

Discourse does not reflect social reality, it produces it. Four theoretical lenses ground this interpretivist position: Hall (1997) on representation and discourse, Gilroy (1987) on culture and racial formation, conceptions of racial neoliberalism taken from Fatsis (2019), and *the apparent citizenship contradiction* this article develops to examine the coexistence of formal legal equality and the racialised cultural governance which has been a key means through which drill has been policed.

Hall's theorisation of representation is the foundational interpretive tool. This research utilises Hall's key insight that institutions are active participants in the construction of meaning and mobilise discourse in the production of categories through which society is governed (Hall, 1997). Hall's (1997) framework directs this research to examine how the language policing drill does not have neutral meaning; it is the instrumental mechanism through which the genre has become positioned as a social threat. To address the primary sources used in this project, this research will also make use of Hall's (1997) further argument that institutional readings draw on collective vocabularies already permeated by racialised assumptions. This saturation of racialised beliefs pre-emptively constructs drill as criminogenic, concealing its criminalisation as justifiable.

Building on Hall's conceptual foundation, Gilroy's work provides the second lens, establishing the structural and cultural consequences of drill being governed. Gilroy (1987) insists that Black cultural production is indivisible from the structural conditions of race and class. This underscores why this project maintains that drill cannot be read merely for its aesthetic form; it is a site where lived experience and structural power actively interact. This is vital to appreciate as it is the genre's articulation of deprivation, racialised policing, and social exclusion that institutional discourse suppresses by typifying drill as criminogenic. Gilroy's work also frames the analytical scaffolding for this project's genealogical approach: a sonic lineage from sound systems through grime to drill, understood as a pattern of cultural forms linked by specific racialised historical connections that can be traced and interrogated.

To elaborate on *why* institutional discourse takes this form, this research uses Fatsis (2019) explanation of racial neoliberalism to direct this study in asking not only how drill is constructed as threatening, but whose interests that constructions serve in sustaining the policing of Black cultural expression. The answer provided by the concept of racial neoliberalism is that the state's criminalisation of drill functions to displace the responsibility for the structural socioeconomic conditions, from the government onto the cultural expressions of those who inhabit them. This works to enable punitive policing to appear as a legitimate response to disorder, rather than a racialised governance of Black sound. In the analysis, this framework will be applied to reveal how the language of policy documents, media narratives and parliamentary debate positions drill as the problem to be policed, obscuring the structural inequalities that drill articulates and a key mechanism through which the juridical criminalisation of the genre is rendered institutionally deniable.

Together these three lenses explain the political logic, discursive mechanisms and cultural consequences of drill's criminalisation. What remains is the specific historical condition revealed by *the apparent citizenship contradiction*, which this research argues is an analytical distinction that exposes the intensification of policing drill as the latest iteration of racialised cultural governance in Britain. The *apparent citizenship contradiction* names the coexistence of formal legal equality and racialised cultural governance, enabling this research to argue that the institutional framing of Black cultural expression as threatening is sustained through the procedural neutrality and stated absence of evidence that facilitate racialised governance continuing unremarked.

Methodology

The object of this study is therefore the institutional language through which drill has been constructed as criminogenic, with parliamentary debate, policy documents, media narratives and court orders approached as discursive texts that actively produce the social world they purport to describe. This epistemological position is grounded in Fairclough's (1992) insistence that form and content are inseparable, which translates to how institutional sources narrating drill are indivisible from their legislative consequences. CDS has been selected because, as summarised by Fairclough and Wodak (1997 in van Dijk, 2015), it recognises that power relations are discursive, that society is constituted by discourse and culture, that discourse does ideological work, and importantly that discourse is historical. Fairclough embeds his analysis in the Foucauldian framework (Zupnik, 1991) as he recognises how accepted discourses in society reflect the power structures (Fairclough 1992; Hall, 1997). This derivation further justifies the genealogical method this project employs. Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk (2015) exemplify that the most powerful discursive operations are those that appear neutral and objective whilst encoding racialised effect. CDS is therefore the appropriate framework for exposing the mechanisms through which formal legal equality and racialised cultural governance are sustained simultaneously without the government needing to name the tension.

Adapting Foucault's genealogical focus, this research follows his method to trace the historical pattern of racialised governance in Britain from the policing of sound systems through the bureaucratisation of Black music by Form 696 to the juridical criminalisation of drill. The sonic lineage connecting drill, as the successor of grime (Sanghavi, 2025) to the Jamaican sound systems Windrush migrants brought to Britain is theorised here through Hall's (1997) work on representation, positing a trend of similar cultural forms connected by racialised historical conditions that can be questioned and traced.

"A primary focus of CDA is on the effect of power relations and inequalities in producing social wrongs…Critical analysis aims to produce interpretations and explanations of areas of social life which both identify the causes of social wrongs and produce knowledge which could (in the right conditions) contribute to righting or mitigating them" (Fairclough, 2013, p.8).

This research is committed to precisely that, building on the pertinent quantitative findings from Quinn et al.'s (2024) review to offer a qualitative, discursive explanation that statistical data cannot provide.

The schema in 'Figure 22.1' below illustrates how powerful groups and institutions control communicative events and their discourse structures, which resultantly shape the social attitudes, ideologies, and sociocultural knowledge of recipients (van Dijk, 2015, p.474). This analytical process functions at two levels simultaneously, exemplifying the discursive reproduction of power. This is the mechanism this research utilises to analyse its sources as evidence for how institutional language constructs drill as threatening in ways that sediment into laws, policies, and prosecutorial practice.

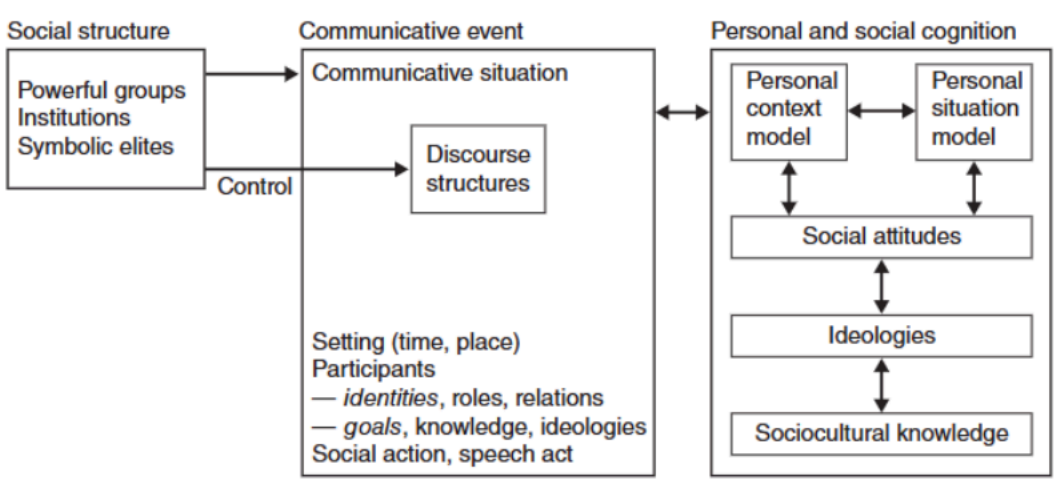

Figure 22.1 Schema of the discursive reproduction of power.

Utilising the findings of this schema structure in combination with Fairclough's (1992) framework, this research is able to analyse each source on the micro-level, evaluating microscopic grammatical structures, particular word choices and varieties of conversation genres. These discursive features discreetly shape our social realities, identities and political beliefs as a site of proactive meaning-making, rather than objective institutional record (ibid). Therefore, this research addresses what Fairclough (1992) identifies as a selection of choices through which language operates, endorsing his view that the words institutions adopt and the genres they borrow from actively construct the reality they *appear* to simply describe. Moreover, at the macro-level which focuses on how texts draw on broader discourse (Fairclough, 1992), van Dijk's framework of elite discourse and power indicates why institutional sources hold such a significant discursive authority. A crucial point van Dijk makes is that:

"Implications and presuppositions are powerful semantic properties of discourse that aim to obliquely assert 'facts' that may not be true, as when politicians and the media refer to the violence of demonstrators or the criminality of minorities" (2015, p.473).

These are key mechanisms through which racialised criteria are mobilised in the five sources this research will analyse, proving how they can operate without being explicitly named (van Dijk, 2015). Van Dijk's work bridges the space between these two levels by explicating how 'racist speech in parliament is a discourse at the interactional micro-level…but at the same time it may enact or be a constituent part of legislation or the reproduction of racism at the macro-level' (2015, p.468). This combined framework proves itself methodologically fitting for this project as it is capable of simultaneously conducting close textual analysis whilst making broader claims about racialised governance. Together, Fairclough's linguistic clarity and van Dijk's analysis of structural power allow this research to interrogate how institutional, political language produces the racialised construction of drill as a social threat to be policed.

Analysis

Drawing from Fairclough's (1992) insistence that form and content are inseparable, and van Dijk's (2015) framework of elite discourse and power, this chapter analyses five sources: AM and Skengdo's gang injunction as a definitive juridical crystallisation of the discursive processes this analysis traces; the Serious Violence Strategy (2018) as a foundational policy text which constructs drill and violence as a causal mechanism at the level of government discourse; Mayor's Question Time (MQT) exchanges revealing how that construction is operationalised through political narratives; Krept & Konan's counter-discourse and finally, Drillminister's *Political Drillin* as the analytical pinnacle that dismantles the causation logic underpinning drill's criminalisation.

Juridical Crystallisation: The AM and Skengdo Injunction

Commencing with the notable case of drill artists AM and Skengdo, at the end of 2018 the duo had just sold out their second UK tour when the police made legal history by using footage of them performing their song "Attempted 1.0" to enact a nine-month suspension sentence for breaching a gang injunction forbidding them from mentioning rival South London MCs (McQuaid, 2019a). This exemplar is the most direct instance in which the discursive construction of drill as criminogenic achieves consequential institutional effect, the performance of music itself became a penalisable criminal act. The fact that this can be articulated as a legal outcome is itself analytically notable, as this possibility was produced by the accumulation of racialised institutional discourse that will be traced in this chapter.

Under the Policing and Crime Act 2009, gang injunctions have been deployed alongside Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) to control the activity of drill artists (Sanghavi, 2025) by putting restrictions on their lyrics, performances and movement across specified postcodes. The statutory guidance accompanying the Act details that its definition of gang-related violence is 'intentionally broad and wide-ranging' to allow application across a variety of local contexts (Home Office, 2016, p.7). However, this research interprets that breadth with further scrutiny to expose that analytically, it enables the extension of gang-related logic into Black cultural production of drill, hence facilitating the footage of AM and Skengdo performing "Attempted 1.0" to be sufficient evidence of the gang injunction breach. BBC News (2019) reported that the court found violence in drill music *can,* and in this instance *did* amount to gang-related violence. This legal decision of causality is important because it demonstrates the juridical turn where an explicit violent act does not have to have occurred as instead the music renders itself constitutive of violence.

In an interview, AM stated that the police 'twanged the law in a way that can work against us', adding that the injunction was still being legally contested when it was treated as having been breached, as enforcement 'ended up using a [Croydon] county court to deliver sentences which would normally have to be proved in a criminal court' (McQuaid, 2019a). Observing this through an interpretivist lens, this research emphasises that using a county court, for what should be proven in criminal court, reveals a juridical process that is not maintaining a neutral application of law. Furthermore, the injunction still being legally contested whilst it was treated as having been breached suggests that the police are enacting what van Dijk (2015) would identify as a presupposition of criminal offence based on (the artists') cultural identity, an action facilitated by the power of elite discourse and discursive operations that appear neutral and objective but encode racialised effects (van Dijk, 2015; Fairclough, 1992).

The Metropolitan Police publicised the outcome of this case as a 'victory' in their plight against inner city violence (McQuaid, 2019b), amplifying the media attention and escalating the situation which positioned AM and Skengdo not just as defendants, but public symbols of the threat drill music poses to societal order. This dynamic is captured by Fatsis' (2019) application of Williams' (2014) "Black folk devil": in a racial neoliberal order, agencies of law enforcement are enrolled to police the victims of structural disadvantages as the enemy, with drill artists consequently cast as responsible for urban crime and disorder. Within this framework, this research indicates how the British government deflects accountability through political discourse that redirects blame for its own anti-welfare policies onto those living within them.

This first source exemplifies how the legal outcome of AM and Skengdo's case is a juridical criminalisation of drill that formalises discursive constructions of the genre as a threat in British law, whilst simultaneously broadcasting them outwards as societal truth.

Constructing Causal Threat in Government Policy

HM Government's Serious Violence Strategy (2018), hereafter 'The Strategy', is a pertinent source to include in this analysis because it provides the governmental discursive structure within which drill's criminalisation accelerates. However, crucially, drill is not explicitly named within The Strategy. The omission of naming drill represents a significant analytical point: The Strategy's (2018, p.31) language about social media "glamorising weapons and gang life" and content that "incites violence" (ibid) operates as a discursive framework that other institutional actors (politicians, police commissioners, prosecutors) then apply to drill. This example indicates how discourse can be a passive mechanism that conceals the negative actions of the state (van Dijk, 2015), as through this research's interpretivist approach, it becomes evident that The Strategy is a legitimising architecture through which governmental text can validate the appearance of a causal connection between drill and crime by criminalising online content, gang culture and violence within official policy language. The insistence of a causal relationship between drill and violence is presupposed by The Strategy thus it does not need to identify drill as Black music for the logic described by van Dijk to function, as he explains that at the level of government discourse, a relationship that remains empirically contested is considered settled when sufficient weight of institutional voices have converged around it (2015). The collective vocabularies already saturated with racialised meanings are what the institutional readings draw from (Hall 1997).

In Fairclough's (1992) terms, The Strategy accomplishes a genre-mixing move by assimilating cultural commentary about music into the procedural framework of a crime prevention strategy. This positions the connection between online content, gang culture and violence within official policy language before it is established empirically. Consequently, the genre arrives 'pre-coded' by what Hall (1997) noted are vocabularies saturated with racialised meanings, and that pre-coding is what makes the absence of explicit racial language consistent with the production of racialised effects.

Policing Drill Through Procedural Neutrality

Form 696 establishes the institutional logic that was inherited by many subsequent instruments that govern policing drill. In 2008 the Metropolitan Police introduced the Promotion Event Risk Assessment Form 696 which required promoters and licensees to pinpoint and mitigate the risks of serious violent crime at music events. The form required event promoters to identify the genre(s) of music being performed and the ethnic makeup of their expected audiences (Fatsis, 2019). Originally the form listed bashment, RnB and garage as example genres. However, this was amended in 2009 when the explicit list was removed and instead required any event primarily featuring DJs or MCs performing to a recorded backing track to complete the assessment: in application this description overwhelmingly applied to grime, garage and bashment genres whose artists used this performance structure and audiences were predominantly young Black Brits (Fatsis, 2019; BBC News, 2017). Despite the form not explicitly naming race, this research's use of Fairclough's (1992) concept of a selection of language choices reveals that the selection of music genres and audience demographic as the relevant categories for risk assessment was a decision that encoded racialised criteria of suspicion into administrative procedures. In 2017 Form 696 was discontinued; Conservative MP Matt Dijk's (2015) framework, this research exposes how institutional discourse operates through passive Hancock was an 'unexpected but influential ally' in this process, tweeting that the Metropolitan Police had "seen sense & scrapped the discriminatory #form696." (Gayle, 2017). However, through van constructions that conceal negative actions of state agents. The form was withdrawn but the racialised rationale it institutionalised was not disrupted; as Fatsis (2019) observes, this framing facilitates discrimination as subjective perception rather than institutional fact. It is this rationality, traced here genealogically through the Foucauldian lens, which mutates and resurfaces across new regulations policing drill.

This logic re-emerged, intensified and was further encoded in Operation Domain, a cataloguing of drill music videos and lyrics that the Metropolitan Police view as intelligence, associating content to gang-related serious violence and validating removal requests to YouTube and other platforms (London Assembly, 2025). As of June 2025, the Operation (now renamed the Online Harm Referral Team) remains active. When queried by the London Assembly to specify the criteria through which lyrics are determined as linked to serious violence, the Metropolitan Police cite 'persons within content suspected of association with a gang/organised crime network' and 'inflammatory language considered to provoke real world violence' (London Assembly, 2025). This vague criterion is analytically expository as it requires no proven association or act of violence, demonstrating what is noted in CDS as guilt being presupposed through proximity and cultural membership as opposed to individual culpability (van Dijk, 2015).

The exchanges within the MQT consolidate this analysis: in response to questioning the policy governing removal requests, the Metropolitan Police state that the approach is to 'remove any genre of music if there is a threat to violence' (London Assembly, 2020a). The continuation of race-neutral language allows this genre-neutral criterion to perform neutrality while encoding a discriminatory standard of application. These passive constructions and genre-neutral discourse mask racialised operations behind the grammar of procedural objectivity (van Dijk, 2015). No response in the MQT exchanges need to say race or Black for this to function, which is exactly what this methodological approach of Fairclough and van Dijk's framework is designed to expose.

An additional MQT answer affirms this analytical revelation in its starkest form. When asked how many convictions of drill artists for violent crime or gang-related offences had been recorded since 2016, the Metropolitan Police responded that this data was not held and then appended that 'there is no evidence to suggest that certain genres of music are directly responsible for criminal activity' (London Assembly, 2019). This is contradictory to the court's conclusion that drill music can amount to gang-related violence (BBC News, 2019), and as the Police lack the data to substantiate its targeting of the genre, they also concede the evidential basis for that targeting by saying it does not exist.

Campaigners from the group Art Not Evidence have urged ministers to make music lyrics inadmissible in court, contesting that the practice of presenting lyrics as evidence of gang affiliation disproportionately affects young Black men and criminalises creativity (Bakare, 2026). This impugns the MQT response where the Police stated that 'there are no offences in relation to the 'Publication of Drill Music'' (London Assembly, 2020b). The absence of explicitly racialised criteria in institutional discourse is how the juridical criminalisation of policing drill music is sustained. The Metropolitan Police's concession that no genre of music directly causes criminal activity (London Assembly, 2019), made simultaneously alongside the systematic treatment of drill content as criminal evidence, is the mechanism which insulates this criminalising practice of Black cultural expression from institutional accountability.

Counter-Discourse in Parliament

Drill artists Krept (Casyo Johnson) and Konan (Karl Wilson) are just two of many who are subject to this criminalising apparatus that operates through racialised criteria. In June 2019, they released *Ban Drill* (Krept and Konan, 2019), a song/short film that accumulated over one million views within days of posting on YouTube. *Ban Drill* illustrates the consequences of prohibiting drill music, depicting a story about a young artist using music as an outlet away from a life of crime who is stifled by the legislation that is censoring and criminalising young Black artists. *Ban Drill* was released alongside Krept and Konan's Change.org petition against the criminalisation of drill music (Bakare, 2019) and the film ends with a strong lyrical message from the protagonist having just been stabbed; "feds [police] ask who's responsible, I just kept it real, I said "whoever banned drill" (Krept and Konan, 2019, 08:00). In light of this petition, Diane Abbott MP invited Krept and Konan, AM and Skengdo and other relevant figures to the Houses of Parliament to discuss the impact and challenge the censorship and criminalisation of drill (Keith, 2019; Ward, 2019).

The discursive flow traced in the previous examples of this chapter mirrored van Dijk's (2015) schema of the discursive reproduction of power (Figure 22.1). Here, that flow operates in reverse as the 'sociocultural knowledge' Krept and Konan sparked through gaining media attention and petitionary social action made its way into institutional discussions. Abbott had already spoken in parliamentary debate about tackling youth violence, contesting that 'drill music is not a "cause" of violence but a "reflection of these young people's lives"' (BBC News, 2018), similarly explained in Krept and Konan's interview with Good Morning Britain (2019) where Konan said they're "rapping about their reality because this [making drill music] is a situation that can help change their lives". The support of Abbott partially displaces the control of a political narrative that positions drill music as threatening. As van Dijk's (2015) findings emphasise, politicians and media's assertions are taken as 'facts' even when they may not be true; however, Abbott's inclusion of drill artists' own experiences helps to dismantle this powerful semantic property of institutional discourse.

In Parliament, Konan emphasised drill is being used as a scapegoat (Ward, 2019). The methodological approach of this research helps to expose that ‘rap musicians can become racialised scapegoats for (such) crime despite a lack of causal evidence’ (Sanghavi, 2025, p.193), because the state discharges its welfare responsibilities for stringent policies that enlist law enforcement agencies to police the victims of the neoliberal social order as state enemies, with drill artists positioned as the ‘Black folk devil[s]’ (Fatsis, 2019, p.1301). The concept of folk devil (Cohen, 1972; Hall et al., 1978; Williams, 2014) articulates how drill artists become antagonists of the government narrative for rises in violent crime and social disorder.

Krept’s insistence to the House that violence pre-existed drill (Ward, 2019), and popular drill artist Digga D’s similar claim that violence will always occur with or without drill (Sanghavi, 2025), are justifiable assertions disregarded when the government maintains there can be a causal relationship between drill and gang-related violence (BBC News, 2019). Quinn et al (2024) quantitative report denies a causal chain; this qualitative analysis explains the validity of that denial by detailing how the discourse surrounding Black British cultural expressions facilitates an intensification and institutionalisation of policing drill music, because the presupposed identity associated with ‘Blackness’ (Oliver, 1990) and criminality depicts a continuous racialised logic targeting Black music.

***Political Drillin*: Discursively Dismantling the Criminalisation Logic**

Political Drillin is the starkest exemplar of drill’s framing. Where institutional discourse has constructed the genre as causal of criminal behaviour, DrillMinister’s song performs that same construction from within the genre itself. By sampling violent rhetoric drawn directly from parliamentary speech and setting it to a drill beat, the song exposes that institutional discourse can be used to produce a song with the same violent characteristics that drill artists are penalised for releasing.

The consequence of this revelation is what this research has embarked on exposing: that the criminalisation of drill music is not a direct response to the violence within the language, but to the accumulation of racialised stereotypes through which ‘Blackness’ itself has been constructed as threatening in British culture. Therefore, this research is underlining that ‘Blackness’ is not an inherent property of drill artists being criminalised, rather that it is a category which has been actively produced through racialised institutional discourse. This is consistent with Hall’s (1997) foundational argument that institutions generate the categories through which they govern, rather than in response to the threats that exist independently of that production. The genealogical method employed throughout this research has traced that institutionally produced construction of ‘Blackness’ as threatening, and it is in *Political Drillin* that this cumulative logic is most starkly exposed.

Political Drillin sets the rhetoric of parliamentary discourse to a drill beat, formulating lyrics from quotes like Chancellor George Osborne’s statement that he would not rest until a political adversary was “chopped up in my bags in my freezer” and MP Jess Phillips’s declaration that she “won’t knife you in the back, I will knife you in the front” (Link_Up TV, 2018). This inventive lyricism allows Drillminister to infer that the government’s targeting of drill is not premised on the violent lyrical content itself but the artists producing it. Fairclough (1992) explains that selections of words are associated with their relevant genre of discourse, and through this lens Drillminister’s clever lyricism reveals the contradiction within institutional narratives that claim drill music is ‘glamorising violent crime’ (Home Office news team, 2018). By making a drill song using the words of violent political language, Drillminister exposes that the characteristics of drill that deem it criminogenic and worthy of censorship according to the institutional forces, can be maintained through politicians’ vicious discourse. This emphasises that the vessel of drill music is not inherently criminal, it is the state that racialises the artists who create it.

Political Drillin is the analytical pinnacle this chapter has built towards because it performs the refusal of drill's interpretation as uniquely criminogenic, demonstrating that the institutional boundary drawn around the genre is not simply drawn because of a causal relationship between drill music and violence. This exposes the racialised governance around drill music that has been continually fixated on restricting Black British cultural expressions. The Metropolitan Police's own concession that "there is no evidence to suggest that certain genres of music are directly responsible for criminal activity" (London Assembly, 2019), analysed alongside this drill song, is more than a bureaucratic technicality, it reveals itself as discursive contradiction that the government currently sustains. *Political Drillin* makes it discursively undeniable that the absence of evidential basis isn't incidental to drill's targeting, but constitutive of how that targeting operates. The concept of juridical criminalisation this research has examined, a process through which discursive constructions of Black cultural expression as threatening have become inscribed into British legal apparatuses, finds in *Political Drillin* its most direct, expository exemplar.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the juridical criminalisation of drill music represents the intensification of a racialised cultural governance sustained through the British government's systematic omission of racial language while encoding racial criteria through neutral-sounding administrative, legal and discursive mechanisms. Existing scholarship traces this pattern to the colonial era, but this research argues that the formal legal equality granted to Commonwealth migrants arriving as British subjects post-Windrush makes that period a more analytically revealing starting point. The persistence of racialised governance despite that citizenship promise constitutes a structural betrayal of British citizenship's own guarantees.

Scholarly work presented a strong foundation for this argument, though much of it had not yet accounted for the analytical power of the specific historical condition this article defined as the *apparent citizenship contradiction*: the coexistence of formal legal equality and racialised governance sustained through the systematic omission of racial language, which is a key means by which racialised governance can be practised whilst remaining institutionally deniable. The term apparent is deliberate, signalling both that the contradiction is observable in the lived conditions of Black Brits, and that it is institutionally framed as procedural rather than the structural discrimination this research argues it constitutes. The genealogy traced here explains why the discourse analysis examples took on their racialised forms. Once citizenship was formally promised post-Windrush, racialised governance could not remain as overt as it did in colonial times, so it migrated to the neutral procedural architecture of laws and policy practices. The omission of racial language became the mechanism through which the policing of this 'new sprig in a family tree of Black music' (Oliver, 2023, p.2) was institutionalised and intensified.

Adopting a critical, constructionist framework, this research looked beyond literal interpretations of institutional language to explain the political logic, discursive mechanisms and cultural consequences of drill's criminalisation. The analysis demonstrated how the construction of Black cultural expression as a social threat progressively migrated from overt policing into legislative practices, reaching its analytical pinnacle in Drillminister's *Political Drillin*, which dismantled the causation logic sustaining drill's criminalisation. Drill may be a genre with undeniably violent lyricism, but as empirical data has consistently shown, it is not directly responsible for violent crime. It has instead functioned as a scapegoat (Ward 2019; Sanghavi, 2025), constructed through the historically accumulated racialised assumptions through which 'Blackness' itself has been institutionally produced as threatening (Hall, 1997; Oliver, 1990).

This article made two pertinent contributions. Firstly, it offered an empirical evaluation by tracing how the racialised governance of Black sound in Britain has been sustained across the post-Windrush period through procedurally neutral mechanisms, culminating in the juridical criminalisation of drill today. Secondly, it presented a conceptual contribution through the *apparent citizenship contradiction*, an analytical lens that names the coexistence of formal legal equality and racialised governance as the condition through which institutional discrimination has been continually rendered deniable. Together these contributions intervene in the literature on the policing of drill, an ongoing operation within British legislation that has direct consequences for the young Black artists currently being prosecuted for their creative expression. The fact that the government can simultaneously promise equal citizenship and criminalise the cultural expressions of those it made that promise to, is not a failure of the system but the mechanism through which racialised governance has been sustained, intensified and rendered institutionally deniable across the post-Windrush period this research has traced.

This thesis does not, however, exhaust the analytical reach of the framework it develops. Future research could productively extend the *apparent citizenship contradiction* beyond the cultural domain to the 2018 Windrush Scandal, when many of the Caribbean migrants this research focuses on were wrongly detained and deported on the basis of documentary requirements that, like Form 696 and the gang injunction criteria analysed here, were enacted through an analogous race-neutral procedural logic. Reading the policing of drill alongside the Windrush Scandal would investigate whether the framework developed through this research can illuminate how post-Windrush Britain governs 'Blackness' across cultural <u>and</u> legal-administrative domains simultaneously. The juridical criminalisation of drill should not be finalised at the endpoint of this analysis, instead it is a revealing site within a salient wider field of racialised governance that this analysis invites further scholarship to interrogate.

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Crisis, Populism and Anti-Immigration Politics in Britain

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the sources of support for Reform UK, arguing that anti-immigration attitudes function as a discursively mediated expression of economic insecurity rather than an autonomous cultural disposition. It contributes an original synthesis of social reproduction theory and populism studies, demonstrating that the binary between economic and cultural explanations of radical right support is analytically false. Situating Reform UK's rise within the conditions produced by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and subsequent austerity, the dissertation argues that the material contraction of welfare and social provision generated the insecurity that Reform UK's populist rhetoric has strategically reframed as cultural threat, translating a crisis of social reproduction into a crisis of national belonging.

A mixed-methods design combines quantitative analysis of British Election Study Wave 29 (N = 31,098) with Critical Discourse Analysis of Reform UK and UKIP political communications spanning 2014–2026. Binary logistic regression identifies anti-immigration attitudes as explaining 37.9% of variance in Reform support independently, rising to 41.0% when populist attitudes — elite distrust, British identity, and subjective economic insecurity — are included, consistent with partial mediation. The qualitative analysis applies Aslanidis's Collective Action Framing and Laclau's chain of equivalence to examine how Reform UK's rhetoric constructs a unified antagonism between austerity-induced insecurity, immigrant threat, and elite betrayal. Particular attention is paid to

femonationalist and orientalist narratives that mobilise gendered and racialised threats to consolidate a racially exclusive British national identity. The dissertation finds that support for Reform UK is best understood not as a reflection of objective socioeconomic position, with income and housing tenure showing weak associations, but as the product of a discursive process in which subjective insecurity is translated into racialised hostility. Economic and cultural explanations are inseparable dimensions of the same process; Reform UK's rhetoric functions as the mechanism through which material anxiety is consolidated into targeted political hostility.

Introduction

Right-wing populist parties (RPPs) have moved populism from what was previously understood as a 'normal pathology' of western democracy to a 'populist zeitgeist' at the centre of mainstream politics (Mudde 2004, p. 541). This phenomenon is evident across Europe: from Viktor Orbán's 2010 – 2026 illiberal democracy in Hungary, to the electoral breakthroughs of France's National Rally, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and Fratelli d'Italia (Bíró-Nagy 2017). Each represents distinct but structurally comparable articulations of RPPs (Xiong 2023, p. 241). The re-election of Donald Trump in 2024 as the president of the United States (US) further illustrates how populist rhetoric is broadening the boundaries of acceptable political discourse normalising previously controversial attitudes. As political figures achieve or consolidate success despite, or through derogatory language, prejudices recently considered socially unacceptable have found renewed political expression (Crandall et al. 2018, p. 186).

Reform UK's rise reflects a broader transformation in British politics, in which traditional class-based voting alignments are less rigid as new divisions structured around identity and culture are becoming increasingly significant (Evans and Tilley 2017, p. 714). Reform UK has rearticulated a familiar populist project within a post-Brexit context, presenting itself as an insurgent force challenging a corrupt and unresponsive establishment. At the core of this appeal lies a populist logic that constructs politics as a struggle between a virtuous people and a corrupt, self-serving elite. In post-Brexit UK, immigration functions as the primary discursive vehicle through which this antagonism is expressed (Mudde 2004, p. 543).

This dissertation examines the sources of support for Reform UK by analysing the interplay between socioeconomic conditions, political attitudes, and national identity. It engages with a key debate in the literature on radical right populism: whether support for such parties is primarily driven by economic 'left-behind' status or by cultural and identity-based grievances (Fetzer 2019, p. 3849, Inglehart and Norris 2016, p. 1). While some accounts emphasise the role of material deprivation and class position, others highlight the growing importance of value-based cleavages, particularly those linked to immigration, national identity, and distrust of political institutions that operate in an increasingly volatile electoral landscape (Inglehart and Norris 2016, p. 4). This study finds that support for Reform UK cannot be reduced to objective socioeconomic positions but is the outcome of a mediated process in which subjective economic insecurity is translated into political preferences through strategic cultural and discursive frames.

Literature Review

Theorising Populism

The literature on populism is marked by conceptual contestation, with ideational, discursive and strategic approaches offering three distinct accounts. The most influential ideational definition of populism remains Cas Mudde's (2004, p. 544) conception of a 'thin-centred ideology'. Unbound to a specific host ideology, this approach understands populism as organised around a moral binary between a 'pure people' and a 'corrupt elite'. Detached from the traditional left-right axis it enables international and cross-temporal comparison (Mudde 2004, p. 543). Yet this same parsimony is criticised for disregarding the contextual and discursive variation through which populism emerges (Aslanidis 2024, p. 59). This Manichean logic renders politics a zero-sum contest in which criticism of the populist leader is construed as a witch-hunt orchestrated by corrupt elites (Mudde 2004, p. 562;

Müller 2016, p. 20). The high moral stakes render any compromise with 'corrupt elites' a betrayal of 'the people', sitting in fundamental tension with the pluralist foundations of liberal democracy. While populist politics can operate across diverse contexts, it is increasingly articulated through national identity, grounding moral antagonisms in a politics of belonging and cultural attachment (Inglehart and Norris 2016, p. 4).

The ideational approach is criticised for treating populism as a stable set of beliefs, thereby underplaying its strategic and performative dimensions. Understanding populism's contextual and discursive enactment in contemporary Britain therefore requires a thicker account of the term. Paris Aslanidis (2024, p. 59) understands the characteristics outlined by Mudde as discursively constructed collective action frames (CAF) rather than a static ideology. The discursive approach conceptualises populism as a 'meaning-making operation' structured around three stages: the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational, which function respectively to assign blame to a specific entity, prescribe a solution and cultivate a sense of temporal urgency (Aslanidis 2024, p. 58, Benford and Snow 2000, p. 616**)**. This approach emphasises human agency in constructing a 'level of reality' through discursive signifiers such as 'the people', 'sovereignty' and 'national identity' (Aslanidis 2024, p. 52, p. 57). Ernesto Laclau (2005, p. 40, p. 70-71) argues that these signifiers are 'emptied' of their content and reconstrued to function as 'nodal points' that draw together disparate grievances. Akin to Aslanidis's diagnostic stage, Laclau (2005, p. 35) theorises that populism requires the naming of an antagonistic group to blame for shared grievances. This establishes a chain of equivalence between grievances such as material insecurity or political distrust, and a named out-group (Laclau 2005, p. 71).

Where the discursive approach is useful in providing an account of populism's symbolic architecture, the political strategic approach (PSA) offers insight into the importance of the 'personalistic leader' (Weyland 2021, p. 185). Rhetorical devices are understood as a deliberate political strategy deployed by leadership figures seeking to establish and consolidate a mass following (Weyland 2021, p. 187). While there may be specific nodal points within the populist discourse, an otherwise fluid ideology enables a 'revealed preferences approach' whereby populist strategy is calibrated to exploit 'conjunctural opportunities', such as economic crisis, that provide the conditions for successful mobilisation (Weyland 2021, p. 186). While PSA has been criticised for an excessive focus on leadership, sidelining demand-side factors, this study understands both aspects as co-constitutive of populist mobilisation (Rueda 2021, p. 174). This integrated approach, combining Aslanidis's CAF stages with Laclau's chain of equivalence and Weyland's PSA, is applied to United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and Reform UK, cases that combine named out-groups, charismatic leadership and discursive flexibility.

Realignment & Reform UK

Historically, the British electoral landscape was anchored in the material stability of a geographically concentrated industrial working class whose shared conditions provided the structure for durable partisan alignment. Shared employment and communal 'third spaces' fostered cohesive social identities that reinforced a 'neighbourhood pattern' of voting behaviour (Miller 1997, p. 65). Deindustrialisation and the expansion of the middle class eroded this alignment, displacing the electorate from partisan loyalty toward an increasingly volatile and de-aligned model of voting behaviour (Denver 2005, p. 292). This transformation incentivised a Downsian convergence, reflected in New Labour's strategic pivot to the centre (Downs 1957). In courting the median voter of the growing middle class, New Labour successfully captured the centre but alienated its traditional voting base (English et al. 2016, p. 581). This representational vacuum rendered old Labour voters available to parties able to articulate their sense of abandonment, a dynamic reflected in growing working-class support for UKIP (Ford and Goodwin 2014, p. 152).

UKIP, formerly a marginal Eurosceptic party, evolved into an organised populist movement culminating in the 2016 Brexit referendum. Nigel Farage subsequently founded the Brexit Party and, in 2021, Reform UK, consolidating socially conservative concerns around opposition to the EU, immigration, and the established political class. While Reform UK may appear as a repository for disaffected conservatives, the working class constituted 42% of UKIP's support between 2004 and 2013 (Ford and Goodwin 2014, p. 152). Daniel Oesch (2008, p. 350) identified this as a seemingly 'paradoxical link'; those most at risk in the labour market frequently support radical right-wing protectionism in apparent contradiction to the left-wing interventionism that would more directly serve their material interests. This 'proletarianisation' of support demonstrates that such actors have occupied the representational vacuum by organising an insider-outsider antagonism that condenses disparate working-class grievances regarding material insecurity into a singular, exclusionary nationalist diagnostic frame (Mudde 1999, p. 183; Aslanidis 2024, p. 57).

Denver and Johns (2022, p. 211) argue that a 'geographical bifurcation' has occurred between cosmopolitan centres and 'left behind' rural towns producing divergent political cultures. This electoral restructuring is characterised by the emergence of a 'vertical axis' of sociocultural and post-material values, specifically a libertarian-authoritarian dimension that cuts across the horizontal axis of traditional left-right conflict (Denver and Johns 2022, p. 211; Norris and Inglehart 2019, p. 19). This reconfiguration advantages insurgent parties, enabling the exploitation of 'conjunctural opportunities', while their absence of a governing record leaves them unfettered by the electoral 'punishment' associated with policy failure (Weyland 2021, p. 186; Clarke et al. 2009, p. 315). Since 2015, growing polarisation suggests that Brexit activated a vertical, libertarian-authoritarian axis of political conflict, a cleavage that has persisted following the UK's exit from the EU (Denver and Johns 2022, p. 211). Reform UK's focus on law and order, border control, family values, and national identity, issues that strongly predicted leave support in 2016, map onto the socially conservative pole of this axis. This aligns with Norris and Inglehart's (2019, p. 32) cultural backlash thesis, which identifies anti-immigration attitudes and national identity as value-based rather than materially driven predictors of authoritarian populist support. While established literature identifies age, education, and ethnicity as robust demographic predictors of support for Reform UK, this study seeks to identify the subjective attitudinal dispositions and the populist discursive frames that contribute to its base, thereby moving beyond demographic description toward an explanatory account of how structural conditions are translated into political preference (Ford and Goodwin 2014, p. 175).

Financial Crisis and Social Reproductive Insecurity

This section examines the structural conditions produced by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC), arguing that the material pressures of austerity displaced reproductive costs onto households, generating the insecurity that RPPs have strategically reframed as cultural and demographic threat. Central to this analysis is Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), which holds that capitalist accumulation is subsidised by and requires the unpaid labour that is performed in the domestic sphere (Fraser 2017, p. 33). This is grounded in Marx's analysis that the exploitation of labour power constitutes the sole source of surplus value in the circuit of capital accumulation (Marx [1867]1977, p. 106). The unpaid work required to produce and maintain capable labour power thus represents an unremunerated yet indispensable subsidy to capital, one that is systematically concealed by the devaluation of feminised reproductive labour (Fraser 2017, p. 33; Peterson 2005, p. 517). The tension between capital's dependence on reproductive labour and its systematic devaluation of that labour was intensified by the move from Fordist to financialised capitalism. The breakdown of Bretton Woods (1971-1973) detached money from its commodity value and facilitated greater financial expansion. This enabled states to competitively deregulate constraints on financial circulation to attract mobile capital. Alongside deregulation, declining real wages undermined household purchasing power (Kotz 2008, p. 11). In a state of overaccumulation, capital was increasingly redirected into fictitious instruments such as credit and complex derivatives, generating financial claims that expanded beyond the circuit's capacity for realisation (Bresser-Pereira 2010, p. 3; Clarke 1994, p. 96; Jessop 2004, p. 4). The collapse of the US subprime housing bubble revealed that trillions of ostensibly safe securities could not be validated, exposing what Bob Jessop (2004, p. 4) terms the failure of 'temporal fixes' that defer rather than resolve the structural contradictions of capitalist accumulation. An increasingly integrated financial system saw this crisis operate at a global scale.

This crisis revealed how aggregate demand and social reproduction had been sustained through household debt while real incomes remained stagnant (Bresser-Pereira 2010, p. 14). Jessop (2004, p. 5) theorises that crisis under capitalism functions as a violent regulatory mechanism, devaluing capital and labour power to clear surpluses and renew the conditions for accumulation. Similarly, Loïc Wacquant's (2012, p. 66) concept of the 'centaur state' - liberal at the top, punitive at the bottom - argues that financial deregulation at the top necessitates a corresponding withdrawal of the 'social hand' of the state at the bottom (Fraser 2017, p. 33). The UK's response to the GFC began with bank bailouts and developed into a politically guided intensification of market rule and austerity policy (HM Treasury 2012, p. 24, p. 40). Fraser (2022, p. 9) understands financialised capitalism as inherently self-cannibalising, devouring the social foundations on which it depends through the contraction of welfare provision.

As individuals are driven into credit dependency to avoid poverty and maintain social status, they are subjected to market discipline and intensified financial precarity (Foucault 2008, p. 139, p, 146). The effects of 'disciplinary neoliberalism' are disproportionately absorbed through increased pressure on residual public services and the concentration of reproductive burdens onto the domestic sphere (Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage 2022, p. 1305). Simultaneously, the state shifted responsibility for contested economic outcomes onto ostensibly neutral technocratic authorities through what Burnham (2001, p. 127) terms the strategic 'depoliticisation' of monetary and fiscal policy, obscuring the political authorship of austerity and intensifying the institutional distrust that Reform UK subsequently exploited.

Public services that had previously alleviated the fiscal, emotional and temporal costs of social reproduction, such as community centres, social care and child benefits were systematically contracted under austerity, displacing these costs onto households already trying to manage stagnant or declining real wages (Briggs and Hall 2023, p. 15). Women disproportionately absorb the intensified reproductive burden alongside their exploitation in the sphere of production; this dual exploitation manifests most acutely through time poverty, labour market withdrawal, and an increased psychological burden (Fraser 2017, p. 21). This condition of social reproductive insecurity, characterised by material precarity, institutional abandonment, and the displacement of care costs onto already-strained households, constitutes the subjective experience upon which Reform UK's populist discourse operates. Consistent with Aslanidis's (2024, p. 57) diagnostic stage of CAF, Reform UK attributes this insecurity, experienced most acutely by those hit hardest by austerity, to immigrant competition for scarce public resources, converting structural economic grievances into an exclusionary political demand. The relationship between SRT and populism is therefore not merely complementary but structurally necessary: austerity cannibalises the social foundations that Fordist stability once provided, generating the affective conditions of abandonment and scarcity that populist discourse translates into a crisis of national belonging. This is a dimension that accounts focused on labour market position and cultural values have overlooked.

From Grievance to Support

Thiemo Fetzer's (2019, p. 3849) analysis of the Understanding Society Study identifies a significant association between welfare retrenchment and UKIP support, concluding that austerity cuts functioned as an 'activating factor' for the success of the Leave campaign in the 2016 referendum. Those most affected by welfare cuts were more likely to report political inefficacy and institutional abandonment, particularly among those from communities previously reliant on routine and manufacturing employment (Fetzer 2019, p. 3849). While Fetzer (2019, p. 3852) notes the era's anti-immigration rhetoric, he does not formally model it as a statistical mediator. This study addresses that gap, testing whether anti-immigration attitudes mediate the relationship between subjective decline and Reform support. It extends the insights from Fetzer's contribution to a post-Brexit landscape, providing temporal relevance to the recent surge in Reform UK (Heath et al. 2024, p. 91). Though Fetzer establishes that austerity functioned as a material trigger for populist support, his work focuses primarily on benefit receipt, lacking the range of attitudinal and discursive dimensions to understand how material hardship is articulated into a 'nationalist common sense' (Kılınçoğlu 2024, p. 89).

Antonio Gramsci (1971, p. 10) provides a structural account of this discursive translation, theorising how changes in the sphere of economic production generate new configurations of social groups including subaltern groups, often racially or culturally distinct that are constituted in relation to and against the dominant bloc. This aims to preserve hegemonic consent by channeling social antagonism toward those groups rather than toward existing power relations (Gramsci 1971, p. 10). Muzafer Sherif et al.'s (1961, p. 201) social-psychological account complements this, experimentally tracing the origins of prejudice to material competition for scarce resources, rather than to innate disposition. Relative deprivation theory extends this further, emphasising the potency of comparison and competition (Runciman and Bagley 1969, p. 363). It finds that perceived or experienced insecurity relative to a reference group, rather than objective material position, is the primary driver of political grievances (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000, p. 847).These frameworks collectively inform the central hypothesis of this study: that Reform UK's rhetoric scapegoats subaltern groups for the material consequences of austerity, generating the affective conditions through which right-wing nativist narratives translate economic grievance into anti-immigration political demands (Aslanidis 2024, p. 58).

While economic disruption can provide the conditions for political realignment, it cannot determine its direction or success. Stuart Hall's (1979, p. 15) concept of Authoritarian Populism (AP) theorises how material conditions can be discursively organised into a coherent right-wing nationalist appeal to 'the people' characterised by authoritarian cultural conservatism and moral authoritarianism. In his analysis of Thatcherism, Hall (1988, p. 10) describes the construction of a vertical cleavage between the hard-working, respectable citizen and the parasitic welfare claimant (Jessop et al. 1984, p. 53-55). This framework retains analytical purchase; immigrants are substituted for the welfare claimant as the object responsible for depleting state resources from the 'deserving' citizen, despite their substantial contribution to the UK's care and hospitality sectors (Migration Observatory 2024). That this diagnostic framing persists despite contradicting the empirical record speaks to the discursive power of populist narrative to override evidential counterargument. Fairclough's (2010, p. 218) dialectical-relational approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the basis to examine how this operates. This approach understands discourse as simultaneously constituting and being constituted by social relations; power, institutions and beliefs 'internalise' language without being reducible to it. This is directly relevant to how Reform UK's diagnostic framing acquires common-sense status despite contradicting reality (Fairclough 2010, p. 218). This enables Laclau's 'naming' operation through which a demand, "once one of many", in this case, immigration control, "acquires centrality and becomes the name of something exceeding it" (Laclau 2005, p. 120).

Methodology

This dissertation employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative survey analysis with qualitative CDA to examine the attitudinal and discursive bases of Reform UK support. A critical political economy ontology is adopted, while a constructivist epistemology holds that structural crises only generate specific political outcomes when articulated through constructed antagonisms. The quantitative component identifies statistical associations between economic insecurity, populist attitudes, and Reform UK support, while the qualitative component examines the discursive mechanisms through which structural grievances are politically articulated.

Data Source

British Election Study (BES) Wave 29 (July–September 2024) was selected as the primary quantitative dataset for its temporal proximity to Reform UK's 2024 electoral surge and the broader rise of anti-immigration, nationalist movements (Heath et al. 2024, p. 91), providing a large sample of 31,098. Valid sample sizes vary across variables due to missing data. Variable selection is theoretically driven rather than exhaustive, constituting an acknowledged source of specification bias. As a voluntary panel study, the BES is subject to non-response bias — those agreeing to participate in long-running political surveys are likely to be more politically engaged than the general population, potentially underrepresenting the most disengaged segments of the electorate in which populist support may be concentrated. Demographic factors including age, gender, and ethnicity, are widely explored in other literature and are omitted to maintain analytical focus on attitudinal predictors, yet this is acknowledged as a limitation (Ford and Goodwin 2014, p. 152).

Operationalising Variables

Variables were selected to operationalise the theoretical framework's core constructs: objective and subjective economic insecurity and populist attitudinal dispositions, including anti-immigration attitudes that were also a hypothesised mediator.

Reform Support

Reform support (BES Variable 245) is operationalised as an overall attitude toward Reform UK on a like-dislike scale rather than vote choice, minimising the influence of tactical voting on underlying attitudinal dispositions.

Immigration Attitudes

Anti-immigration attitudes (BES Variable 359) operationalised the discursive framing of economic insecurity as cultural threat by capturing the out-group hostility dimension of Mudde's (2004, p. 562) thin-centred ideology. Theoretically positioned as both a mediator between structural conditions and Reform support and an independent predictor, this variable is modelled as a dependent and independent variable across the regression models. While central to Reform UK's populist appeal, anti-immigration is not grouped with other variables measuring populist characteristics to enable clear comparison.

Objective Economic Insecurity

Objective economic insecurity is operationalised through gross household income (BES Variable 1472) and housing tenure (BES Variable 1467), capturing objective material position and long-term economic security respectively. Their inclusion provides an empirical test of the relative deprivation hypothesis that subjective rather than objective insecurity constitutes the more politically consequential driver of Reform support (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000, p. 847).

Subjective Economic Evaluation

Subjective economic evaluation is operationalised through expected household financial situation (BES Variable 251), capturing perceived economic trajectory rather than absolute position. This is consistent with relative deprivation theories as described above (Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage 2022, p. 1315; Alesina and La Ferrara 2000, p. 847).

Populist Attitudes Variables

Two variables operationalise the populist characteristics of Reform UK's appeal. Trust in MPs (BES Variable 877) captures the anti-elite sentiment central to Reform UK's anti-Westminster position and British identity (BES Variable 881) captures the in-group national belonging through which this appeal is articulated. These are analysed separately rather than combined into an index as they are not assumed to exhaust the full range of populist beliefs. Individual analysis permits clearer assessment of their distinct contributions to Reform support and anti-immigration attitudes.

Recoding

All variables were recoded into three ordinal categories to ensure directional consistency, with higher values indicating stronger alignment with populist attitudes and Reform support; Reform support and immigration attitudes were additionally recoded into binaries for use as dependent variables in logistic regression. Responses coded Don't Know (9999) were treated as missing throughout. The three-category recoding prioritises strong attitudinal alignment over moderate positions, consistent with the study's focus on Reform UK's populist core.

Quantitative Analysis

Frequency distributions were generated for all recoded variables and verified against original data. Cross-tabulations were conducted for each variable against Reform support to identify associations of greatest substantive significance. Given that large samples such as the BES (N = 31,098) can achieve statistical significance for substantively negligible effects, a conservative significance threshold of $p < 0.01$ is applied throughout (Sedgwick 2014, p. 349). Effect size is measured using Cramér's V, with thresholds adjusted for degrees of freedom ($df = 4$): $ES < 0.05$ reflects a negligible association, $0.05 \leq ES < 0.15$ a weak association, $0.15 \leq ES < 0.25$ a moderate association, and $ES \geq 0.25$ a strong association (Cohen 1988, p. 222; Zaiontz, n.d.).

To ensure the model captures moderately associated variables yet prioritises substantive predictors, only variables with a Cramér's V exceeding 0.10 are carried forward to regression analysis. Model fit is assessed using adjusted Nagelkerke R^2, interpreted against Cohen's (1988, p. 283) benchmarks of small (0.02), medium (0.13), and large (0.26) effect sizes. Given the positive coding direction established above, adjusted odds ratios (OR) above one or higher indicate a greater likelihood of Reform support or anti-immigration attitudes respectively. Multicollinearity diagnostics confirmed no evidence of collinearity across variables (VIF < 5; tolerance > 0.2). Mediation is tested using Baron and Kenny's (1986, p. 1176) four-step procedure. As binary logistic regression cannot confirm mediation directly, this test is indicative rather than definitive; bootstrapped indirect effects via Hayes's (2018) PROCESS macro would provide more robust analysis (Bolin 2014, p. 336). The following regression models assess predictor strength and test the mediation pathway:

- Model A examines the collective and independent predictive power of populist attitudes and anti-immigration attitudes on Reform support. A hierarchical entry structure isolates the contributions of anti-immigration attitudes and populist attitudes, by entering the anti-immigration attitudes in Block 2 after controlling for the populist attitudes.
    - Dependent variable: Reform UK Support
    - Block 1: Economic Insecurity, Elite Distrust, National Identity
    - Block 2: Immigration Attitudes

- Model B reverses the entry order to assess the change in model fit between blocks when anti-immigration attitudes are entered first, providing a basis for comparison with Model A and enabling bivariate assessment of anti-immigration attitudes on Reform support in Block 1.
    - Dependent variable: Reform UK Support
    - Block 1: Anti-Immigration attitudes
    - Block 2: Economic Insecurity, Elite Distrust, National Identity

- Model C was designed to investigate the relationship between populist attitudes and anti-immigration by using anti-immigration attitudes as the dependent variable. It aims to better understand how anti-immigration functions within models A and B while assessing whether anti-immigration attitudes function as an indirect mediator between populist dispositions and Reform support.
    - Dependent variable: Anti-Immigration Attitudes
    - Predictors: Economic Insecurity, Elite Distrust, National Identity

Critical Discourse Analysis

Political attitudes do not translate directly into political behaviour but are mediated through discourse, which frames grievances and assigns meaning to material conditions. CDA is applied to political rhetoric produced by Nigel Farage, UKIP, and Reform UK to examine the discursive mechanisms through which structural grievances are politically mediated. Where the BES analysis identifies statistical associations between attitudinal dispositions and Reform support, CDA explores how these associations are produced and assigned meaning. Aslanidis's (2024, p. 59) CAF provides the primary analytical framework, as defined in 2.1. Laclau's (2005, p. 71) chain of equivalence directs attention to how disparate grievances are unified through a shared antagonist, while Weyland's PSA (2021, p. 185) directs analytical focus toward Farage as a personalistic leader whose rhetoric reflects deliberate conjunctural strategy.

Three theoretically grounded coding categories are applied:

- **Invasion narrative**: Operationalises out-group naming by identifying language that constructs immigration as an existential threat to national sovereignty or cultural identity.
- **Welfare competition**: Operationalises language that constructs a zero-sum antagonism between the deserving citizen and the undeserving outsider.
- **Anti-elite sentiment**: Operationalises language that constructs the political establishment as complicit in generating and sustaining immigration and, in this view, also social insecurity.

Corpus Overview

Sources were selected to capture variation across the institutional, mediated, and informal contexts through which Reform UK's rhetoric operates. Consistent with Weyland's (2021) PSA and Fairclough's (2010, p. 221) recognition of multimodal texts, the sample is typologically diverse, spanning parliamentary contributions, conference speeches, press interviews, social media content, campaign materials, and press coverage.

Parliamentary contributions (2025) provide formally constrained elite communication enabling analysis of rhetoric within institutional debate. Party conference speeches (Farage 2014–2025) represent strategic communication directed at partisan audiences, revealing the movement's core CAF in controlled settings. News interviews and press conferences (2025–26) provide mediated communication under journalistic challenge, testing CAF consistency across less controlled environments. Social media content (X and YouTube 2024–26) enables analysis of direct, unmediated populist communication at scale. The 2016 UKIP campaign poster is included as symbolic communication analysed for the compression of the diagnostic CAF into visual form. Press coverage (2026) captures the broader discursive environment within which Reform UK's rhetoric is circulated and amplified.

Restricting analysis to a single communicative format would only capture one register of a strategically flexible rhetorical project. The dataset spans 2014–2026, corresponding to UKIP's post-austerity surge, the 2016 Brexit referendum, and Reform UK's recent mobilisation — each representing 'conjunctural opportunities' identified by Weyland as activating populist support. Variation across these contexts is analytically productive, revealing how the movement's collective action frame is adapted across audiences while maintaining its core diagnostic structure.

Coding and Analysis

Coding was conducted iteratively, with categories refined through repeated engagement with the Reform UK's political communications. Where multiple themes appeared within a single extract, simultaneous coding was applied, reflecting Laclau's (2005, p. 71) argument that populist discourse derives its power from condensing multiple grievances into a unified antagonism. Quantitative findings regarding Reform UK's attitudinal base are integrated with qualitative analysis of how political actors translate diffuse economic anxiety into targeted hostility toward a racialised out-group, illuminating the mechanism connecting structural conditions to populist political demand (Fairclough 2010, p. 221). Following Fairclough's (2010, p. 218) argument that discourse analysis must move beyond textual description toward explanation of the social conditions that produce and are reproduced by language, quoted extracts function as illustrative anchors for theoretically informed analytical claims rather than as standalone evidence.

Quantitative Results

Survey Data: British Election Study Wave 29 Internet Panel July – September 2024

The sample skews toward Reform scepticism (64.9% strongly disliking), consistent with Reform UK's minority but electorally significant base. 50.6% of the sample favoured reducing immigration and 51.4% identified as very strongly British. Valid sample sizes across the four independent variables range from N = 28,105 to N = 30,486, indicating minimal missing data concerns.

Bivariate Analysis

To examine associations between attitudinal variables and Reform UK support, cross-tabulations were conducted for each variable, using Cramér's V to assess effect size.

Table 1. Reform Cross Tabulation Summary

Variable	Cramér's V	Valid N
Trust in MPs X Reform ***	.105	28,214
Economic Evaluation X Reform ***	.164	26,593

British Identity X Reform ***	.179	28,646
Anti-Immigration X Reform ***	.389	27,663
Housing Tenure X Reform ***	.056	28,364
Household Income X Reform ***	.079	21,755

Note: Total N = 31,098, *** = $p < .001$

All six variables demonstrated statistically significant associations with Reform UK support ($p < .001$). Consistent with the exclusion threshold of Cramér's $V < 0.10$ established in the methodology, housing tenure ($V = .056$) and household income ($V = .079$) demonstrated only weak associations and were excluded from further analysis. The most notable finding is the substantially stronger association between anti-immigration attitudes and Reform support ($V = .389$) relative to all other variables, which cluster within a narrow band between $V = .105$ and $V = .179$. This gap suggests that immigration attitudes function as the dominant attitudinal predictor of Reform support, aligning with the theoretical expectation. It supports the application of Aslanidis's (2024, p. 57) diagnostic stage in which immigration is identified as Reform UK's primary out-group. Among those strongly liking Reform, 93.2% favoured reducing immigration compared to just 1.4% favouring increased immigration showing near-complete alignment between strong Reform support and anti-immigration attitudes. Among those strongly disliking Reform, only 29.6% favoured reducing immigration, confirming that opposition to immigration is strongly aligned with Reform support. This is consistent with Mudde's (2004, p. 562) out-group hostility framework. Trust in MPs ($V = .105$) demonstrates a modest but significant association, with those expressing low institutional trust appearing as substantially more likely to strongly support Reform (52.6%) than those with high trust (2.8%). This supports the anti-elite dimension of populism explicit in Reform UK's anti-Westminster positioning (Mudde 2004, p. 543). Subjective economic evaluation ($V = .164$) shows a comparable pattern: those expecting their financial situation to worsen were substantially more likely to strongly support Reform (58.3%) than those expecting improvement (9.2%). This supports the relative deprivation hypothesis that perceived economic trajectory rather than absolute material position constitutes the more politically consequential driver of populist support (Alesina and La Ferrara 2000, p. 847).

British identity produced the second strongest association (V = .179), with strongly British respondents most likely to strongly support Reform (71.4%) compared to those not identifying as British (4.4%) - consistent with Norris and Inglehart's (2019, p. 32) cultural backlash thesis which identifies the role of national identity in anchoring Reform UK's populist appeal. Taken together, these findings confirm the theoretical expectation that Reform support is driven by a cluster of populist attitudinal dispositions, with anti-immigration attitudes operating as the dominant predictor. This pattern justified the examination of whether anti-immigration attitudes also mediate the relationship between populist attitudes and Reform support.

Regression Analysis

Predicting Reform Support

Binary logistic regression was conducted individually for economic evaluation, British identity, elite distrust, and anti-immigration attitudes to examine their individual effect on Reform UK support. While each variable independently predicted Reform support, hierarchical regression was employed to assess the incremental explanatory power of populist attitudes and anti-immigration when the other was controlled for.

Model A. Binary Logistic Regression: Reform Support: Populist Attitudes and Anti-Immigration (*Table 2. Block 1)*

Variable	OR (95% CI)
British Identity ***	2.580 (2.44-2.728)
Elite Distrust ***	1.809 (1.803-1.982)
Economic Evaluation ***	1.890 (1.707-1.917)
Nagelkerke R^2	0.162
Constant	-6.263
χ^2	2727.989

N=23,909 *** = P<.001, CI=Confidence Intervals, constant reported as log-odds coefficient (β).

Block 1 enters the three populist attitude predictors simultaneously. All three significantly predicted Reform support ($p < .001$), with British identity returning the strongest association (OR = 2.580), followed by subjective economic evaluation (OR = 1.890) and elite distrust (OR = 1.809), together explaining 16.2% of variance in Reform support (Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.162).

Table 3. Block 1: Populist Attitudes Block 2: Immigration Attitudes

Variable	OR (95% CI)
British Identity ***	1.624 (1.527-1.726)
Elite Distrust ***	1.392 (1.306-1.484)

Economic Evaluation ***	1.482 (1.407-1.561)
Anti-Immigration ***	10.330 (9.472-11.266)
Constant (β)	-10.077
Nagelkerke R^2	0.410
χ^2	7645.110

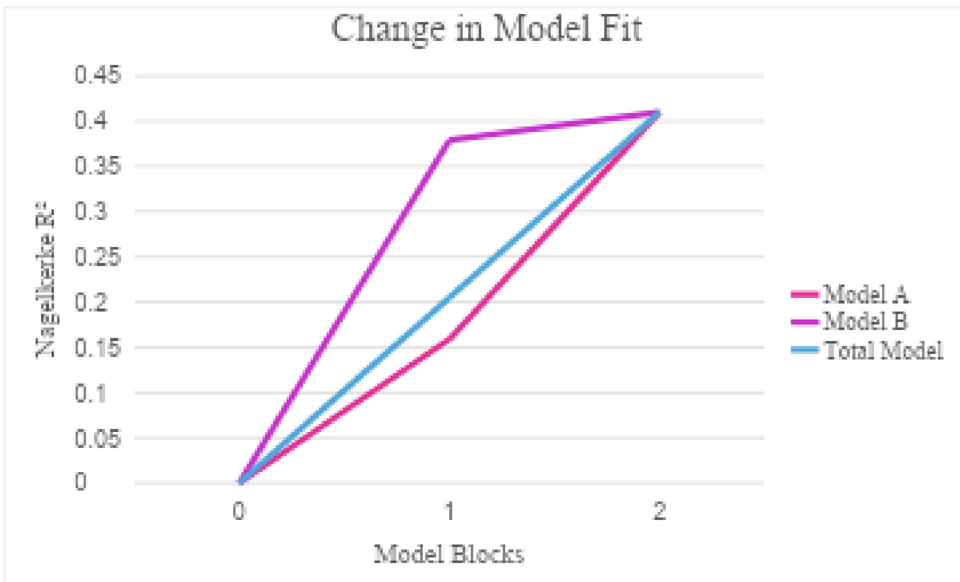
N=23,119 *** = P<.001

The addition of anti-immigration attitudes in Block 2 produced a substantial increase in model fit ($\Delta R^2 = 0.248$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.410$). The odds ratio of 10.330 indicates that the odds of supporting Reform UK among those holding strongly anti-immigration attitudes are over ten times those of respondents who do not, confirming anti-immigration attitudes as the strongest single predictor in the model.

The odds ratios for all populist attitude variables decreased substantially following the inclusion of anti-immigration attitudes: British identity from 2.580 to 1.624, economic evaluation from 1.890 to 1.482, and elite distrust from 1.809 to 1.392, a pattern of attenuation that is consistent with partial mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986, p. 1176). This suggests that these variables influence Reform support partly through their association with anti-immigration attitudes.

Model B. Binary Logistic Regression, Reform Support: Anti-Immigration and Populist Attitudes

The attenuation pattern identified in Model A warranted a second hierarchical model reversing block entry order, entering anti-immigration attitudes first to establish its independent contribution before the addition of populist attitude variables. The results of Model B are illustrated in Figure 1.



N=23,119, All variables significant at P=<.001

Key: Model A (Block 1: Populist Attitudes, Block 2: Anti-Immigration), Model B (Block 1: Anti-Immigration, Block 2: Populist Attitudes), Total Model (all).

Figure 1 shows the contribution of each variable block across Models A and B. The total model, including all predictors, explains 41.0% of variance in Reform support (R^2 = .410). Model A demonstrates that when populist attitudes are entered first, the addition of anti-immigration attitudes produces a substantial improvement in model fit (ΔR^2 = .248), confirming its dominant explanatory role. Model B reveals that anti-immigration attitudes alone account for 37.9% of variance (R^2 = .379), with the addition of populist attitudes producing only a modest incremental improvement (ΔR^2 = .031). This asymmetry is the key analytical finding: anti-immigration attitudes are the primary driver of model fit, while populist attitudes provide additional but substantially smaller explanatory power. This aligns with the theoretical argument that populist attitudinal dispositions are translated into Reform support through the discursive nodal point of immigration (Laclau 2005, p. 71; Aslanidis 2024, p. 58). A second regression model was therefore completed to examine whether British Identity, economic evaluation and trust independently predict anti-immigration attitudes.

Predicting Anti-Immigration

Model C. Binary Logistic Regression, Anti-Immigration: Populist Attitudes

Table 4. Binary Logistic Regression: Anti-Immigration Attitudes

Variable	**OR (95% CI)**
British Identity ***	3.391 (3.215-3.576)
Economic Evaluation ***	1.866 (1.781-1.955)
Trust in MPs ***	1.890 (1.775-2.011)
Nagelkerke R^2	.221
Constant	-4.792
χ^2	3473.304

N=20,842 *** = P<.001

Table 4 presents the odds ratios for each populist attitude variable in predicting anti-immigration attitudes. British Identity, economic evaluation, and trust in MPs were entered simultaneously in a single block. The three populist attitude variables collectively account for 22.1% of variance in anti-immigration attitudes (Nagelkerke R^2 = .221), with British identity returning the strongest association (OR = 3.391).

This confirms that populist attitudinal dispositions are significant independent predictors of anti-immigration attitudes. Together these models support partial mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986, p. 1176): populist attitudes predict anti-immigration attitudes (R^2 = .221), which predict Reform support (R^2 = .379) while the direct effect of populist attitudes attenuates but does not disappear when anti-immigration attitudes are included (R^2 = .410). British Identity, economic insecurity, and elite distrust appear to influence Reform support both directly and indirectly through their association with anti-immigration attitudes. Anti-immigration attitudes appear to function as the primary, but not exclusive mechanism through which populist dispositions generate Reform support. The qualitative analysis that follows examines how this mediation operates.

Qualitative Analysis & Discussion

The Invasion Narrative

The quantitative findings establish anti-immigration attitudes as the dominant attitudinal predictor of Reform support, accounting for 37.9% of variance bivariate and producing an OR of 10.330. The scale of this alignment operationalises the 'us versus them' antagonism central to populist rhetoric (Mudde 2004, p. 543), supporting the hypothesis that anti-immigration attitudes function as the 'signifying glue' through which Reform UK's collective action frame consolidates disparate grievances (Aslanidis 2024, p. 57; Laclau 2005, p. 71). The following discourse analysis examines how Reform UK constructs immigration as a threat and the mechanisms through which this construction shapes its supporters' political perceptions. Reform UK's construction of immigration as an 'invasion' that the party 'promises to reverse' simultaneously operationalises the diagnostic stage, the naming of a racialised out-group as responsible for collective decline, and the prognostic stage, prescribing itself as the only solution (Aslanidis 2024, p. 58; Yusuf 2026). The 2015 refugee crisis provided the conjunctural opportunity through which immigration was elevated to a central element of populist mobilisation across Europe and was followed by an increase in racialised constructions of non-western subjects (Xiong 2023, 241; Weyland 2021, p. 186). The UKIP Breaking Point poster (2016) compresses this diagnostic logic into visual form. It shows a dense queue of racialised refugees positioned beneath the claim that the UK has reached its 'breaking point'. Consistent with Fairclough's (2010, p. 221) recognition of multimodal texts as discourse, the image performs Laclau's (2005, p. 120) 'naming' operation, condensing the anxieties surrounding Brexit into a single, racialised antagonist. Published one week before the 2016 referendum, the poster exploits precisely the conjunctural opportunity Weyland (2021, p. 186) identifies as necessary for successful populist mobilisation, while the urgency of 'breaking point' operationalises Aslanidis's (2024, p. 58) motivational stage by constructing the political situation as demanding immediate alignment rather than considered deliberation.

Farage's framing of immigration as an invasion of 'cultures that are alien to ours' (Farage 2025a) can be analysed through Edward Said's (1979) concept of Orientalism. Said (1979, p. 7, p. 33) theorises how the non-western subject is discursively constructed as backward, dangerous, and incompatible with the 'civilised' west, a logic that structures Reform UK's racialised construction of immigrant communities. Addressing Parliament on UK membership of the European Convention on Human Rights, Farage (2025b) references 'Brazilian murderers and rapists' and 'an illegal immigrant from Iran' admitted to the UK, constructing a chain of equivalence between immigration and criminality through his foregrounding of ethnicity (Laclau 2005, p. 71). His description of this as a list that 'goes on and on' elevates anecdotal cases into a generalised construction of immigration as an uncontainable and systemic threat.

This framing operates alongside what Farris (2012, p. 184) terms 'femonationalism'. This theorises that apparent concern for women's safety from racialised male threats such as 'Pakistani child sex offenders' is used to justify nationalist exclusion (Farris 2012, p. 185; Farage 2025b). Robert Jenrick MP (2025b), a Conservative MP prior to joining Reform UK in January 2026, told a reporter that 'rape gangs' with 'medieval attitudes towards women' are being allowed into the country. Jenrick's comments are situated within the public memory of cases such as the Rochdale child sexual abuse ring. The case involved British Pakistani men and gained widespread attention from 2012 onward. While such cases warrant national attention, their prominence in comparison to other such cases reflects how Asian men are linked to sexual offences through racialised narratives (Tufail 2015, p. 30). A 2020 report from the Home Office found 'no answer' on a link between ethnicity and Group Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) cases despite coverage that suggests an over-representation of black and Asian offenders proportional to the national population (Home Office 2020, p. 80-81). Despite this, sensationalist reporting on the 'dangerous masculinities' of migrant men continues to reinforce the association of sexual crimes with racialised migrant men (Tufail 2015, p. 31). The front page of *The Sun* (April 2026*)* read 'migrant rapist on the run for murder' describing a 'monster arriving on a dinghy' aggressively foregrounding his migrant status in both the caption and headline (Atherley 2026, p. 1).

Spivak's (1985, p. 93) formulation that white men feel compelled to save brown women from brown men identifies the racialised logic of a colonial saviour that structures this discourse. Reform UK's rhetoric reproduces this structure, shifting its logic from imperial to nationalist, repositioning white men as protecting the 'women in our country' from racialised men. Reform politicians regularly express concern for "women at risk of sexual assault and rape" by men "predominantly from Muslim countries like Afghanistan" (Pochin 2025). Sarah Pochin MP (2025) blamed this on a "warped view on their right to sexually assault women" generalising men from these countries as believing they have a "right" to commit acts of sexual violence. The predictive power of British identity in both Model A and C (OR:1.624 and OR:3.391) adds to this argument. It shows that a strong British identity increases the odds of both anti-immigration and Reform UK support. Feminationalist discourse constructs immigrant men as threats to 'our women' while obscuring the indispensable reproductive labour performed by immigrants, especially women (Farris 2012, p. 193).

This contradiction reveals the racialised logic structuring attitudes toward different migrant groups. Research demonstrates that attitudes toward immigrants are stratified by proximity to whiteness. Britons express significantly greater willingness to support Ukrainian refugees than those from Syria or

Somalia, a disparity attributed to the racialised perceptions through which different migrant groups are constructed (Xuereb 2023, p. 3**)**. Reform UK's rhetoric mobilises and reinforces this racialised hierarchy, with Farage's warning that Britain will "look like a foreign land" (Farage 2014) operationalising the diagnostic stage's construction of cultural displacement as existential threat (Aslanidis 2024, p. 57). As construed in Farage's language, the criminalised immigrant operates as a convenient object through which the state can contain the social dislocations experienced throughout austerity and deflect discontent away from the retreat of welfare provisioning (Wacquant 2009, p. 69). In constructing immigrants as a threat to British identity, this discourse mobilises existing racial and gendered assumptions, naturalising prejudice as common sense rather than ideology. The racialised immigrant emerges as the primary subaltern antagonist, stratified along the ethnic and religious lines that Gramsci (1971, p. 10) identifies, providing a visible form of the impacts of elite corruption. The regression confirms this pattern: the three populist attitude variables collectively account for 22.1% variance in anti-immigration attitudes (R^2 = .221) with British identity returning the strongest association (OR = 3.391).

Welfare Chauvinism

The prognostic stage of Reform UK's collective action frame prescribes welfare restriction to a national in-group as the solution to perceived scarcity (Aslanidis 2024, p. 58). Jenrick's claim that immigrants 'milk the state' (2025a) performs this by attributing the material consequences of austerity and financialised capitalism to immigration, rather than to the structural contradictions and monetary policy that produced them. This operationalises Andersen and Bjørklund's (1990) concept of welfare chauvinism, constructing a zero-sum antagonism between the deserving citizen and the parasitic outsider. This desire to 'take back control' offers a simplified solution to the structural contradictions that have underpinned the stagnation of living standards, declining wages and increased risk of poverty that the UK has experienced since 2008 (UKIP 2016; Fraser 2017, p. 33).

The efficacy of Farage's crisis narrative relies upon the genuine socio-economic grievances of the UK electorate. Since 2021 this has been expressed as the cost-of-living crisis. Although the cost-of-living crisis has been intensified by exogenous shocks including the Russia-Ukraine war and COVID-19, its conditions predate them. Prior to the pandemic, Britain's social security system had been depleted by £36 billion since 2010 leaving low-income families with limited capacity to absorb the subsequent 16.4% rise in food prices (Briggs and Hall 2023, p. 41). A decade of 'regressive redistribution' saw the state systematically divest from the sphere of social reproduction forming the material grievances that Reform UK's collective action frame exploits (Briggs and Hall 2023, p. 52). Thus, Farage's (2023a) focus on how immigration is 'making us poorer in every way' appeals to this insecurity, linking immigration to the consequences of austerity policy. In contrast, analysis of the fiscal effect of immigration to the UK since 2000 finds that immigrants have been of 'substantial net fiscal benefit' to the UK and have helped reduce the fiscal burden for domestic workers (Dustmann and Frattini 2014, p. 4). Including EU and non-EU migrants, the implicit human-capital savings stand at over £35 billion (Dustmann and Frattini 2014, p. 4).

Welfare chauvinism aims to channel economic and cultural insecurity into 'nativist grievances' (Andersen and Bjørklund 1990, p. 212; Ennser-Jedenastik 2017, p. 294). As welfare becomes scarcer, immigration scapegoating gains political potency. Paradoxically, the UK's social reproduction architecture is dependent on migrant labour as 'providers of jobs and welfare' (Farris 2012, p. 193). As of 2024, non-UK nationals represented 25% of the social care workforce (Sehic et al. 2024, p. 4). This dependency reflects what Fraser (2017, p. 32, p. 34) terms the 'global care chain'. It identifies that core economies rely upon the often reproductive and feminised labour of migrants. While the remittance model provides some easing to migrant families, the breakdown of local communities and support networks has borne significant consequences for the social reproduction architecture in migrant 'sending' countries (Kunz 2010, p. 915). Despite this, Farage describes immigrants forcing "us" to "provide a new home every two minutes" (Farage 2024). This framing places the blame for social reproductive insecurity, induced by austerity, onto immigration (Aslanidis 2024, p. 58). This framing reproduces a logic analogous to basic survival. By constructing immigrants as competitors for scarce resources and amplifying and mobilising the genuine material scarcity produced by austerity, not immigration. The Leave campaign directly operationalised this, attributing hospital closures and overstretched public services to immigration and EU membership, a tactic that successfully resonated with those hit hardest by austerity (Fetzer 2019, p. 3849).

Despite this, variables selected to operationalise objective economic conditions showed weak association with Reform support. This could suggest that there is no substantial relationship to be found or that these variables are ineffective in capturing objective economic insecurity. Future analysis could include measures such as occupational class or gross personal income. However, a pessimistic economic evaluation, used to capture subjective economic insecurity, showed significance across all regression models with OR values of 1.482 for predicting Reform support and 1.866 for predicting anti-immigration attitudes. These results are consistent with the argument that structural insecurity must be subjectively experienced before generating political mobilisation (Nunn and Tepe-Belfrage 2022, p. 1315). The internal contradiction of Reform UK's welfare chauvinist discourse is illustrated by their simultaneous "pledge to make massive future cuts to welfare spending" (Farage 2026). This reveals a diagnostic frame that deflects accountability from structural economic conditions onto a racialised out-group, consistent with Wacquant's (2009, p. 69) account of the punitive state managing social dislocation through the criminalisation of marginalised populations rather than through welfare expansion. These cuts are planned to be partly funded by restricting government welfare to "exclusively…UK and not…foreign-born nationals" (Farage 2025c). This attitude toward welfare provision assumes that the migrant labour supporting the UK care sector will continue to absorb costs of welfare retrenchment, despite their exclusion from its benefits. The mediation pattern identified supports the hypothesis that when structural insecurity is subjectively experienced, it increases the likelihood of both anti-immigration attitudes and support for Reform UK. Placing blame on a visible out-group offers a tangible, proximate cause for feelings of subjective decline. Reform UK's popularity reflects the success of its populist rhetoric in encouraging this rationale.

Anti-Elite Sentiment

Reform UK constructs itself as an insurgent outsider force, exemplified by Farage's (2014) metaphor of the "UKIP fox in the Westminster hen house", positioning the party as a disruptive presence within a corrupt political establishment. While trust in MPs as a proxy for elite distrust risks oversimplifying broader anti-establishment sentiment, the regression analysis nonetheless demonstrates that the odds of strongly supporting Reform UK are 1.392 times higher among those with low trust in MPs, after controlling for anti-immigration attitudes (Model A, Block 2). Yet the analytical significance of anti-elite sentiment exceeds its relatively modest OR: by identifying 'corrupt elites' as responsible for enabling immigration and depleting welfare, Reform completes its diagnostic chain of equivalence, providing 'the people' with an accountable antagonist for their collective insecurity (Laclau 2005,p. 71; Mudde 2004, p. 543). The construction of the establishment as having failed to control immigration is illustrated by Jenrick's (2025a) claim that it offers "payouts to terrorists", framing state failure as moral betrayal rather than institutional limitation. This moral framing of institutional failure allows Reform to attribute the morbid symptoms of failing infrastructure and stagnant wages to elite corruption rather than systemic economic contradictions (Gramsci 1971, p. 566). Immigrants and the establishment are therefore understood as co-constitutive antagonists within a single Manichean worldview (Mudde 2004, p. 543).

Central to the prognostic stage of Reform UK's discourse is Farage's deliberate self-presentation as a personable outsider. He claims he is not interested in "climbing the greasy pole," positioning Reform UK as the only authentic alternative to a failing political class (Farage July 2022). Weyland's (2021, p. 187) PSA identifies this as the strategic cultivation of direct contact with a mass following by appearing unmediated by institutional politics. This appearance of radical authenticity is reinforced through his rejection of political correctness. By constructing mainstream discourse as a tool of elite management, Reform positions its own transgressive rhetoric as a naming operation that restores political voice to those rendered passive by liberal institutional closure (Laclau 2005, p. 120). Mainstream criticism is therefore construed as a witch-hunt and pre-emptively neutralised (Mudde 2004, p. 543). Jenrick's invocation of Farage as the "lone voice of common sense" naturalises Reform UK's ideological positions as objective truth, completing the populist antagonism and transforming policy preference into a moral crusade to rescue the general will from elite capture (Jenrick 2026).

Farage's description of the World Health Organisation as "clever people who want to bully and tell us what to do" (Farage 2017) extends the elite antagonist well beyond Westminster to encompass international technocratic institutions, a breadth of anti-establishment sentiment that the trust in MPs measure, as acknowledged in the methodology, cannot fully capture. His claim that the establishment sought to force him out of the UK by closing his bank accounts (Farage 2023b) personalises the elite antagonism, constructing concrete evidence of malice that transforms abstract institutional distrust into lived political persecution. This antagonism is further intensified through appeals to British identity, reflecting how Reform frames the political establishment as actively betraying the nation. This urgency is amplified through social media, where Farage's direct unmediated communication distributes the persecution narrative at scale with minimal editorial constraints. This operationalises the motivational stage of the CAF by constructing the political situation as one demanding immediate alignment rather than considered deliberation (Aslanidis 2024, p. 58).

Taken together, the three coding categories do not operate independently but form the chain of equivalence Laclau (2005, p. 71) identifies as the defining feature of populist discourse: corrupt elites enabling criminal immigrants who compete with deserving citizens for the scarce resources austerity has depleted. The improvement in model fit from $R^2 = .379$ to $R^2 = .410$ when populist attitude variables are added to anti-immigration attitudes confirms that this rhetorical architecture is not merely discursive but substantively linked to voter alignment. A populist zeitgeist is empirically legible in the attitudinal data of the British electorate (Mudde 2004, p. 541).

Conclusion

This dissertation examines whether anti-immigration attitudes represent an autonomous cultural disposition or a discursively mediated expression of economic insecurity, a distinction with significant implications for how the sources of right-wing populist support are understood. The evidence presented here favours the latter. Support for Reform UK is not primarily a reflection of objective class position with the associations of household income (V = .079) and housing tenure (V = .056), substantially weaker than all attitudinal predictors, indicating that material deprivation alone does not determine political support. Rather, it is the subjective experience of insecurity, filtered through populist discourse attributing its causes to immigration and elite betrayal, that structures political support.

A mediation pathway is identified and satisfies the four steps of Baron and Kenny's procedure. Subjective economic insecurity is associated with both anti-immigration attitudes and Reform support. This insecurity converges with eroded institutional trust and strong British identity, producing a constellation of grievances that Reform UK's collective action frame attributes to immigration enabled by a corrupt political class. This appears to translate structural economic failure into nativist political demand. Anti-immigration sentiment emerges as the dominant political expression of these grievances, explaining 37.9% of variance in Reform support independently and functioning as the primary nodal point through which disparate anxieties are consolidated into political alignment.

The qualitative analysis illuminates the discursive mechanisms through which this operates. Reform UK's collective action frame deploys an invasion narrative, rooted in racialised constructions of the criminal immigrant (Said 1979, p. 33) and femonationalist mobilisation of gendered threat (Farris

2012, p. 185), as its primary diagnostic stage, naming a racialised out-group as the culpable entity responsible for collective decline (Aslanidis 2024, p. 57). Welfare competition rhetoric operationalises the prognostic stage (Aslanidis 2024, p. 58), prescribing restriction of entitlements to a national in-group as the solution to insecurity produced not by immigration but by austerity's systematic contraction of social reproduction (Fraser 2022). Anti-elite sentiment supplies the motivational urgency, constructing the political establishment as actively betraying the nation and positioning Farage as the authentic voice of the people under existential threat. Together, these three frames form Laclau's (2005, p. 71) chain of equivalence, linking material insecurity, cultural anxiety, and institutional distrust into a coherent antagonism that Reform UK presents itself as uniquely positioned to resolve.

That Farage's political project has found renewed electoral traction in the post-Brexit conjuncture requires explanation. Farage's retirement following the 2016 referendum appeared to signal the conclusion of his political career, yet the conditions generating demand for his movement were not resolved by Brexit. Conservative governance, marked by austerity, pandemic mismanagement, and compounding institutional scandals, exhausted the party's capacity to absorb the grievances it had produced. While mainstream convergence toward the political centre generated the representational vacuum that first enabled UKIP's rise, growing polarisation along the libertarian-authoritarian axis has created fertile ground for a movement positioned at its authoritarian pole (Denver and Johns 2022, p. 211). The capture of seats with deep Labour roots by Reform UK, such as Runcorn and Helsby, underscores this. Rather than class position, the convergence of identity, subjective grievance, and immigration attitudes now structure political choice for a significant portion of the electorate. Whether this trajectory continues depends on conditions beyond the scope of this study, yet the structural contradictions identified in the literature remain unresolved. As Fraser (2022) argues, financialised capitalism cannibalises its own social foundations; this dissertation has argued that the resulting crisis of social reproduction constitutes the affective terrain on which Reform UK's discourse operates.

SRT's contribution to the analysis of radical right populism lies in revealing that the cultural anxieties driving Reform support are not autonomous from material conditions, but the subjective form taken by structural economic grievance when mediated through a nationalist and racialised diagnostic frame. If these conditions persist and mainstream parties fail to offer a credible alternative account of their causes, the populist rhetoric that attributes blame to immigration and elite betrayal sustains its mobilising potential. This dissertation contributes an original synthesis of SRT, political economy, and populist studies to the analysis of radical right support, arguing that the binary between economic and cultural explanations is analytically false. Anti-immigration attitudes are not an independent cultural phenomenon but function as a nodal point through which economic insecurity, racialised threat, and elite betrayal appear to be consolidated into political support. Future research would benefit from integrating demographic variables such as age, education, and ethnicity, alongside the attitudinal predictors examined here, and from extending discourse analysis to examine how Reform UK's rhetoric is received and reproduced by its supporters. Reform UK's support is neither purely economic nor purely cultural in origin. The pressing analytical question is how political actors translate the structural failures of financialised capitalism into targeted hostility against racialised others, and what conditions would be required to challenge that translation

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Global Poverty Chains Reconsidered Through an Analysis of Epistemic Violence and the Limits of Marxist Reductionism

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Abstract

Globalisation is widely understood as the interconnection of world economies, cultures, and populations through trade, technology, and investment. Yet it remains a deeply contested and analytically imprecise concept, one that often obscures more than it reveals. Its value lies less in describing a concrete phenomenon than in exposing how that phenomenon is framed.

Two dominant framings define this contestation. Global Value Chains (GVCs) present globalisation as efficiency-enhancing and development-enabling, emphasising flattened hierarchies, technology transfer, and horizontal collaboration across firms. Global Poverty Chains (GPCs), by contrast, offer a critical counter-narrative. Rather than fostering development, GVCs exploit workers in the Global South through low wages, excessive hours, and poor conditions in service of multinational profit. This paper intervenes in that debate by arguing that both framings, despite their opposition, enact epistemic violence, each deploying ideology to foreclose alternative ways of knowing.

"To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies . . . to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it . . . to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies "

(Orwell 1977, ch. 3, ch. 9).

Chapter 1: Introduction

This essay argues that, reframing Global Value Chains (GVCs) as Global Poverty Chains (GPCs) offers a more ethically grounded understanding of global production by exposing how production networks conceal exploitation beneath narratives of profit maximisation, efficiency, and collective advancement. However, despite its virtues, the GPC framework carries significant limitations rooted in Marxist reductionism, therefore failing to grasp how race, gender, and culture operate as autonomous structuring forces of global production. Notably, both frameworks reproduce what Selwyn (2018), borrowing from Orwell, calls 'doublethink', which is the simultaneous knowing and not knowing that cloaks relations of domination in emancipatory language. Where Selwyn (2018) deploys 'doublethink' to indict GVC discourse, this essay turns that charge against him. I argue that the GPC framework that he defends only reproduces the very epistemic violence it claims to correct.

My argument is threefold. First, I contend that the GVC framework achieves salience through convergence between policy, academic, and corporate discourse. This enacts epistemic violence by privileging productivity metrics while rendering workers' lived realities of subordination invisible. Second, I contend that the GPC framework's Marxist and Marxist Feminist foundations represent a necessary and significant advancement beyond the epistemic limitations of the GVC framework. By exposing super-exploitation and grounding moral accountability in demands for structural redress rather than self-interested benevolence disguised as development, the GPC directly corrects the epistemic violence that the GVC framework produces. In doing so, it restores the analytical legitimacy to the lived experiences of workers it had rendered invisible. Third, however, I demonstrate that this correction is incomplete. Despite these critical interventions, the GPC framework's Marxist reductionism instrumentalises race, gender, and culture as functional mechanisms of class exploitation. This subordinates these dimensions to class relations and thereby reproduces epistemic violence in a different form. By failing to conceptualise the intersecting systems through which workers experience compounded domination, the framework ultimately undermines its own moral imperative, replicating the very hierarchies of erasure and marginalisation it claims to challenge.

Prescription Disguised as Description Through Global Value Chains

The Discursive Convergence of Corporate, Academic and Institutional Power

The rise of GVC as the dominant framework in policy, academic, and corporate discourse does more than describe how global production operates; it actively prescribes which realities are valued, elevating efficiency while simultaneously rendering exploitation and poverty as normal or invisible. This prescriptive function gains intellectual authority from claims such as Sachs' assertion that 'sweatshops are the first rung on the ladder out of extreme poverty' (Sachs 2005, p. 11). Sachs recasts sweatshops as benevolent agents of economic progress for Global South workers, and as a necessary transitional stage to prosperity despite their exploitative conditions. In doing so, this narrative masks the structural power asymmetries between the Global North and South such as multinational corporate dominance, weak labour protections, and unequal bargaining power that fundamentally govern value capture.

Academic discourse on GVC cannot reach salience independently as its dominance depends on convergence with institutional knowledge-production and corporate material interests. Together, they establish the authoritative standards by which global development is largely measured and understood. Given that '90% of US exports and imports flow through a US TNC (Transnational Corporation), with roughly 50% of US trade flows occurring between affiliates of the same TNC', TNCs possess both the structural power over international trade as well as the discursive influence in shaping how these relationships are understood (Dicken 2011, pp. 20-21).

Objectivity is resented as an Ideological Tool

International organisations such as the World Bank wield comparable discursive authority, reinforcing this framing by producing metrics to define what good development and legitimate labour relations should look like. However, these metrics ignore and misrepresent workers' lived conditions. The International Poverty Line (IPL), a monetary threshold that locates which individuals are classified as living in poverty, exemplifies this because it purports to offer a universal and objective measure of deprivation that can guide development policy and assess progress out of poverty. However, as Selwyn reveals, though appearing objective, the IPL is in effect 'arbitrary, in that it does not actually calculate workers' survival needs' (Selwyn 2018, p. 74). Sweatshop workers earning above the IPL threshold are classified as non-poor despite struggling to meet basic needs and being 'forced to undertake undignified work and unhealthy amounts of overtime and live in squalid conditions' (ibid.). This demonstrates how, through a mutually reinforcing relationship between international institutions, academic, and corporate discourse, poverty is reduced to a necessary transitional stage and a statistically rare phenomenon, therefore normalising exploitation while denying its scale.

Epistemic Violence of GVC Framework

Subjugated Knowledges and the Exclusion of Workers' Lived Experience

The epistemic violence of the GVC framework becomes apparent when poverty is understood not as a technical threshold but as a political and moral reality grounded in lived experience. Bolwig et al. (2010, p. 179) challenge its technically framed reduction with their normative reframing of poverty as 'a political and moral, not an analytical term' wherein 'assessments of the poverty impact of value-chain restructuring and governance should be alive to the whole range of meaning and concerns that animate both policy jargon and popular discourse about poverty'. By systematically excluding workers' lived experiences of deprivation and suffering from what counts as legitimate knowledge, epistemic violence is inflicted. This exclusion takes on greater theoretical weight when understood through what Foucault terms 'subjugated knowledges', which is when 'a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition' (Foucault 1980, p. 82). Ultimately, the testimonies of sweatshop workers regarding indignity, exhaustion, and squalor are rendered inadmissible because they fall outside the technical vocabulary of poverty lines and value-chain efficiency. As a result, their experiential knowledge is subordinated to the 'analytical' authority of institutional metrics that validate the very conditions workers endure.

Fricker (2007, p. 163) illuminates this danger further by highlighting that 'when there is a dissonance between received understanding of your own intimated sense of a given experience, it tends to knock your faith in your own ability to make sense of the world'. This reveals that the GVC framework not only operates by excluding workers' knowledge from policy discourse, but also by undermining workers' confidence in their own experiential understanding, consequently eroding their capacity to articulate and contest the conditions of their own exploitation.

Global Poverty Chains: A Marxist Corrective

Super-Exploitation and the Structural Roots of Poverty

Addressing this epistemic violence requires the GPC framework, which offers both clarity about value extraction and moral accountability to workers' experiences as a virtue of its Marxist foundations, thus being morally significant. Reframing GVCs as GPCs repositions workers as the central analytical category, shifting focus from efficiency metrics to livelihood struggles. This is shown through Selwyn's analysis of how the GPC framework 'reformulates principal concepts associated with the (GVC) approach - of value added, rent and chain governance - and challenges (its) core assumption... that workers' low wages are a function of their employment from low productivity industries' (Selwyn 2018, pg. 71). Crucially, it identifies that poverty is not a temporary developmental lag but a structural condition of capitalist value creation in the global production networks. This then enables surplus extraction in the Global North while reproducing deprivation in the Global South. Drawing on Marx's labour theory of value, Selwyn (2018) reveals how the GPC framework demonstrates that firms systematically maximise profitability through immiseration and super-exploitation. This deliberately suppresses wages below workers' survival needs. Where the GVC framework rendered sweatshop workers statistically non-poor through inadequate metrics, the GPC framework reveals that these same workers are systematically super-exploited to combat the epistemic violence of their marginalised realities.

Gendered Labour in the Public Sphere

The GPC mobilises a Marxist-Feminist analysis of global production to also reveal how gender operates as a mechanism through which labour exploitation is intensified. Women workers face compounded disadvantages driven by two interconnected mechanisms that ultimately serve capitalist accumulation. The first is through the public sphere where social norms channel women into informal and unremunerated productive work that sustains global production without offering pay, security, or recognition. A study of a farmed fish supply chain in Bangladesh illustrates this exploitative pattern as researchers 'found that women (were) prevented from accessing and participating in paid productive work' given that 'the gendered division of labour restricts women's activities to hidden and unremunerated tasks such as feeding, pond management, fertilisation and fish preparation' (LeBaron and Gore 2019, p. 1099). This reveals how global production subordinates women through the strategic invisibilisation of their essential labour, rendering their work simultaneously indispensable to supply chains yet unintelligible within economic frameworks.

Social Reproduction and the Private Subsidy to Global Capital

The second mechanism operates in the private sphere where women are exploited through social reproduction, which represents 'the activities associated with the maintenance and reproduction of people's lives on a daily and intergenerational basis' (Ferguson et al. 2016, p. 4). This unpaid work, including childcare and household maintenance, 'effectively provides a subsidy to production' by reproducing and maintaining the labour force without compensation from capital (Kidder and Raworth 2004, p. 13). The GPC framework emphasises how this 'largely unremunerated work classified as 'family labour' compounds their vulnerability to exploitation in paid work' (LeBaron and Gore 2019, p. 1112). This gendered transfer of value enables both corporate profit accumulation and development strategies that rely on precarious, feminised employment. Ultimately, this reinforces the GPC framework's moral significance by demonstrating that global production depends largely on the super-exploitation of women's labour and, by making this dependency analytically visible, it directly counters the GVC framework's epistemic violence through restoring legitimacy to the very forms of labour and suffering that institutional metrics systemically exclude from recognised knowledge.

From Benevolence to Accountability Through Reframing Moral Responsibility

Having exposed the structural mechanisms of gendered exploitation, the GPC framework deploys normative analysis to redefine what constitutes moral responsibility in global production. Where the GVC framework positions exploitation as a (somewhat) regrettable but necessary stage of development, framing ethical action as a charitable assistance to lift workers through market integration, the GPC establishes moral grounds rooted in accountability and redress. Tronto (1993) explains that this normative shift is exemplified through ecofeminist care ethics, which positions humans within webs of interdependent relationships with each other and the natural world. Rather than treating workers as abstract economic units progressing along development ladders, this relational ontology demands recognition of the concrete harms inflicted through super-exploitation. As Marx observed of capitalism, now deeply entrenched in the structure of GVCs, 'in its blind unrestrainable passion, its were-wolf hunger for surplus-labour, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working-day. It usurps the time for growth, development and healthy maintenance of the body' (Marx 1990, pp. 375-376). The dual exploitation of women, invisible within GVC metrics yet foundational to global production, exemplifies this usurpation as broken bodies, exhausted lives, and displaced communities are not unfortunate externalities but direct consequences of value extraction. By framing exploitation as structural violence rather than developmental necessity, the GPC transforms the ethical question from 'how can the Global North help the poor?' to 'how must those who benefit from exploitation be held accountable?' This reframing repudiates Sachs' patronising metaphor of sweatshops as developmental ladders and instead establishes that justice demands dismantling power structures (multinational corporate dominance, asymmetric trade relations, Global North policies). Moral responsibility thus shifts from benevolent actors offering assistance to powerful actors whose material interests depend on sustained exploitation.

The Limits of the GPC Framework through Marxist Reductionism

The Erasure of Colonial Racialisation in the GPC

However, despite its critical intervention against the epistemic violence that subordinates workers' lived experiences in the GVC, the GPC framework remains epistemologically entangled in Marxist reductionism that instrumentalises race as a functional appendage of class exploitation. Robinson observes this tendency in Marxist analysis, demonstrating that 'the dialectic of proletarianization disciplined the working classes to the importance of distinctions… between ethnics and nationalities… and between races' (Robinson 1983, p. 42). This reveals how racial and ethnic divisions are not merely effects of class exploitation but constitute autonomous structuring forces with their own historical trajectories and material consequences.

By treating race primarily as a mechanism through which capitalist super-exploitation operates, the

GPC framework obscures how racialisation itself structures global production independently of class relations. The geographical concentration of labour-intensive production in the Global South is not simply the result of capital seeking cheaper labour, but is premised on centuries of colonial racialisation that rendered non-white populations as simultaneously disposable and exploitable. This racial logic enables a distinct avenue of value extraction, through which Global North corporations and consumers accumulate wealth not only through paying lower wages, but also through the racialised devaluation of Global South workers' labour lives and environments. The GPC's embracement of race under class analysis is morally dangerous because it reproduces a form of epistemic violence even as it challenges the GVC's erasure of workers' experiences, rendering invisible how race operates in a way that is irreducible to labour exploitation alone.

Gender, Culture and the Reproduction of Western Epistemic Authority

The GPC framework similarly reduces gender and culture to functional mechanisms of capitalist accumulation, failing to recognise how patriarchal relations and cultural hierarchies operate as independent systems of domination that shape, and are not only shaped by, global production networks. Even the Marxist-feminist foundations of the GPC framework cannot escape this reductionism, as they interpret women's experiences through predetermined Western analytical categories. Such categories include productive versus reproductive labour, surplus value extraction and social reproduction, which risk subordinating women's own epistemologies to theoretical authority. This operates through what Santos (2014, p. 302) describes as 'abyssal versions of totality and unity of knowledge', whereby Western-Marxist rationality privileges economic relations as the primary lens while rendering other forms of oppression as mere derivatives. When researchers categorise Bangladeshi women's fish farming activities as 'hidden and unremunerated' exploitation, they correctly identify the material extraction of unpaid labour (LeBaron and Gore 2019, p. 1099). However, the framework privileges Marxist-feminist categories of analysis over the women's own articulation of their work within family economies, religious frameworks, or cultural practices. While the exploitation is real, determining that these Western feminist categories represent the most legitimate or complete way to understand these women's experiences risks reproducing epistemic violence by subordinating alternative epistemologies through which the women themselves might name and resist their oppression. This reveals how the framework, despite its interventions, reproduces a parallel epistemic violence by determining what counts as 'real' exploitation, potentially dismissing workers' testimonies that do not conform to its theoretical predictions, thereby reinforcing moral danger.

Orientalism Beyond Class Logic

This instrumentalisation becomes further visible in how cultural norms are deployed to intensify extraction. The 'Docile Oriental Woman' discourse mobilises Orientalist assumptions about subservience and deference, rendering Asian women as inherently suited to subordinate positions in global production (Chakravarty 2007, p. 440). This draws on Said's (1979) analysis of Orientalism as a Western system of thought and power that constructs the 'Orient' as a stereotypical, exotic, and inferior 'Other' to define and elevate the West, serving colonial interests by creating a simplified image of Eastern peoples as backward and needing Western control. In agreement, Chakravatry (2007, p. 454) observes that 'one of the main reasons for the management preferring women is the lower probability of their being involved in trade union practices, on account of their 'docile characteristics'. This demonstrates how racialised and gendered constructions actively structure labour market segmentation beyond purely class-related logics. Therefore, the GPC framework is not morally perfect as it ultimately risks reproducing the very structure it critiques by subjugating workers' experiential knowledge to a different form of theoretical authority.

A Return to Foucault

Knowledges suppressed by critical theoretical frameworks themselves are included in the category of Foucault's (1980) 'subjugated knowledges', in addition to those suppressed by corporate rhetoric and institutional measurements examined in chapter 3.1. When the GPC subordinates race, gender, and culture to class, it renders their distinct historical trajectories of colonial racialisation, patriarchal relations, and cultural hierarchies as analytically inadmissible, recognising each only insofar as they serve the logic of capitalist exploitation. As a result, the knowledge of workers at the intersection of race, gender, and culture is consigned to the margins of the GPC framework's own analytical hierarchy. For example, when the GPC interprets Bangladeshi women's labour through the categories of social reproduction and surplus value extraction, it privileges Western Marxist-feminist epistemology over the women's own articulations of their work within cultural, religious, and familial frameworks. This is not 'doublethink' in the cynical sense, but in the structural sense that Orwell (1977) identified because the framework genuinely believes in its own emancipatory project while foreclosing the very knowledge that would destabilise its foundations. The epistemic violence of the GPC is therefore an expression of the limits of any single-axis theoretical framework that mistakes the comprehensiveness of its critique for the completeness of its knowledge.

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated that while the GPC framework represents a vital intervention against the GVC model's epistemic violence, through revealing super-exploitation and reframing moral responsibility from self-interested benevolence to structured accountability, it ultimately reproduces similar erasures through Marxist reductionism, thus reproducing Orwell's (1977) 'doublethink'. By instrumentalising dimensions of race, gender, and culture as functional mechanisms of capitalist accumulation, it cannot grasp how racialisation, patriarchy, and Orientalism operate as autonomous structuring forces with distinct historical trajectories. This means that the lived reality of a Bangladeshi Muslim woman experiencing compounded exploitation through class, gender, race, and culture remains epistemically invisible. Therefore, despite its critical interventions, the GPC framework cannot serve as a complete remedy to epistemic violence in global production analysis. By privileging Western Marxist rationality, it perpetuates the very erasure of workers' intersectional experiences that it seeks to challenge, revealing the limits of single-axis analytical frameworks in capturing the compounded realities of global production.

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"Soft" Colonization: Presentist Effects of Eminent Domain in the Extraction of Resources in Developing Countries

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BSocSc Politics and International Relations

Abstract

Despite international recognition of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, postcolonial states often enable land acquisition for private and foreign actors in the name of development, resulting in the displacement of indigenous communities. Drawing on theories of neocolonialism, neoliberal accumulation by dispossession, and presentism, this paper argues that such practices reproduce colonial power asymmetries and prioritize short-term economic gains over intergenerational justice. Emphasis on transparency, participation, and institutional safeguards is needed to protect indigenous land rights and preserve democratic capacities for future generations.

Introduction

Has the doctrine made by the United Nations, intending to return the freedom of resource ownership and acquisition to formerly colonized countries, proven to completely erode colonial practices today? The global economy has often been argued to display a hierarchical structure embodying neocolonial relations in international trade, apparent in the lingering colonial practices behind the acquisition of land by foreign and private companies through the practice of eminent domain for the purpose of extracting natural resources. This has become the newest threat that formerly colonized countries must face, a looming practice of colonialism packaged in what is categorized as "soft" to illustrate the creeping effects that mirror the horrors of the colonial period.

Neocolonialism seeks to explain the persistent colonial-like relations and practices apparent between countries in the Global North and their former countries in the Global South, despite clear declaration of formal independence by the latter group of nation states. Colonial rule has undoubtedly reshaped the links between authority and land, social relations pertaining to land, as well as conceptions of property; effects of which linger today. Such lingering effects are prominent in developing countries, as they generally possess economies that rely on the sale of raw materials (Stilz, 2019). By leveraging their ownership and permanent sovereignty as primary-product-producing states, developing countries sought to wield this to their advantage by negotiating durably higher prices for export goods. Imbalances between countries that produce different types of resources perpetuate economic issues in the global economy.

The high oil prices that are demanded by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) pose a severe impact on the economies of non-oil developing countries (Stilz, 2019). The debts these states contracted in order to pay for oil imports lead to a sovereign debt crisis requiring significant economic restructuring, allowing the Western lenders and the IMF power over postcolonial countries' economic policies, paving the way to the Washington Consensus that ushered in the era of late 20th century globalization. This phenomenon is closely linked to the thesis of the resource curse, in which countries with high dependence on natural resources seemingly suffer from negative macroeconomic as well as macro-political effects (Frynas et al., 2017, p.234).

The phenomenon of resource extraction and "land grabbing" from the displacement of communities and lands in developing countries often raises issues closely related to historical colonialism (Ferguson and Veneziani, 2020). Laws and practices surrounding resource extraction are a clear form of presentism being applied by nation states that have proven to not consider later effects that might arise. Drawing parallels to historical colonialism, it is important to understand how such practices affect both the people of today and the people of tomorrow in developing countries. Although scholars have debated and agreed over common views pertaining to eminent domain, resource curse, and the dispossession of indigenous land, the literature shows that there exists a gap in discussing the effects of "soft" colonialism or neocolonialism that arises from the acquisition and dispossession of land. Such indirect forms of colonialism are most prominent in the extraction of resources; as such, practices have proven to oppress, dispossess, and exploit indigenous communities, in almost exactly the same manner as practices applied during the colonial period. Among colonizers there exists a group of elites—in this case, the roles of elites will be applied to the influential government actors who are involved in the exploitation of their own indigenous communities.

Through presentist laws, the future of indigenous populations is not guaranteed. Dennis Thompson claims that democracy is government pro tempore, and rulers exercise power only for a limited period of time, after which they stand for reappointment and reelection, or retire from office (Thompson, 2010, p.19). Thus, political power in nearly all actual democracies is subject to temporal limits. Democracy itself affirms that citizens who are bound by laws should retain a voice in making them, yet future citizens who will be bound by such laws do not possess such voice, as they are yet to exist. This virtue of democracy becomes a vice when the goods and rights of future citizens are at stake.

Thompson argues that presentism manifests itself in the laws that neglect the consequences of genetic engineering, long-term environmental risks, problems of population growth, and the development and preservation of the democratic process. Such presentist effects are also perpetuated by the tendency of most modern democracies to favor the older age group, as this group is vast in number. Decisions to favor the older generation are a form of presentism, wherein some laws, such as creating tax obligations to provide for the older age group, do not guarantee that the younger age group can expect to receive a proportionate return for the benefits that they provide for the current elderly generation.

Presentist consequences of eminent domain for resource extraction that prod and threaten future generations will be the focal point of this paper, along with the parallels drawn to compare with the previously disadvantaged generations in various countries. This paper will argue that presentist effects behind the implementation of eminent domain by nation states in developing countries for the purpose of extracting resources have colonial roots embedded in them. This paper will also propose possible solutions that can help advance the study and solve the issue of presentist laws of eminent domain that seem to prioritize private companies over indigenous communities and people, supported by neocolonialism and neoliberalism theories that unpack the typical guise—the illusion of propelling a nation's economic development forward.

Practices of Resource Exploitation Resulting in Eminent Domain

The United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that "indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories, and resources" (Ferguson and Veneziani, 2020). In response to the horrors faced during the colonial period, the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1803 (XII) in 1962 declared the Doctrine of Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources, which recognizes the "inalienable right of all states to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources... in the interest of their national development and of the well-being of the people of the State concerned." The doctrine was created in an attempt to resolve the structural hierarchies that exist in the global economy, giving developing countries more control in their relations with foreign investors and corporations by way of negotiations that could benefit and boost their economic development. Over the past decade, acquisition of land by foreign corporations, governments, and investors has risen in formerly colonized countries, dubbed "developing countries"—a term illustrating the attempt to gain footing in development, specifically in economic terms. Such acquisitions are done for the purpose of producing biofuels and oil, both of which have grown scarce with time, as well as producing food crops and exploiting land-based resources of minerals and timber (Peters, 2013, p.556).

By definition, eminent domain refers to the "inalienable power of a sovereign state to take possession of the privately or communally-owned property in the interests of its citizens" (Moshood et al., 2020, p.1). The main purpose of eminent domain is to distribute and redistribute material benefits, which can bridge the gap of scarcity for resources by countries that have no means to naturally extract from their own land. A "resource" can be defined as an object that is viewed as instrumentally valuable even if others dissent (Stilz, 2019). Stilz (2019) defines natural resources specifically as raw materials that are available from the natural environment, thus not manufactured by humans, and that are useful or can become useful under conceivable economic, technological, or social circumstances to satisfy human needs and wants.

Before the exercise of eminent domain can occur, two fundamental conditions must be met: public use requirement and compensation (Moshood et al., 2020, p.1). Both conditions imply that the property of any group or citizen can be sacrificed to serve the greater good, so long as there is just compensation to be paid to the owner of the property. While growth may be spurred by public use projects, such projects still may not necessarily benefit the employment prospects of people whose businesses, homes, and lands were displaced or affected as a result of eminent domain (Chen and Yeh, 2014, p.5). In Uganda, for example, the state expropriated communal land for the purpose of exploiting oil. In response to this, the government provided multiple justifications for its actions, including the increase of electricity supply, the improvement of education, the development of road networks, the revenue for the government, and the generation of employment opportunities (Moshood et al., 2020, p.6). Most African governments seeking foreign investors claim that they do so for the "development" or the "public interest" of the country, which invokes the need to facilitate large-scale agricultural production (Peters, 2013, p.557). Using development to justify the acquisition of land can be misguided and misleading as promises of tax revenue and job creation are based on probability, which may never materialize (Bower, 2009, p.59).

Eminent domain has been traced back to neoliberal economics that encouraged the privatization of natural resources and land for economic development (Moshood et al., 2020, p.6). Such neoliberal practices come in the form of states utilizing eminent domain in order to facilitate economic development by acquiring communally or individually owned land for private corporations. Eminent domain is wielded as a veritable instrument of accumulation by dispossession, closely facilitated by the neoliberal age. Thus, accumulation by dispossession has been successfully facilitated by neoliberalism, where land is seen as a commodity to be utilized for enhancing a country's GDP: increasing exports, growth, and overall economic development. Phillips and Sillah agree that eminent domain serves the interest of private corporations instead of the interest of the public, despite championing projects under the banner of public purpose (Phillips and Sillah, 2009, p.121).

The failure of the nation state to differentiate the exploitation and expropriation of land for critical public purposes and public benefits raises ethical questions that must be urgently addressed in order to ensure that indigenous peoples in developing countries are not worse off than they were during the colonial period. Accumulated expropriations disadvantage local people and reduce their access to a decent life, as they are robbed of land for the purposes of subsistence (Nathan, 2015, p.3). Arable land that belongs to indigenous people was dispossessed by force, which deliberately drove them into poor, confined regions with no means of intensifying and modernizing their farming (Amin, 1976, p.327-328). Contrary to this, the ownership of property by an individual can be equated to the lack of control or ownership by another. Additionally, the ownership of a property by a single community also equates to the lack of ownership and control by another community. This imbalance and lopsidedness in property propels unevenness in development. Allowing single individual ownership of key mineral resources might cause crises and factions among members of communities that are rich in minerals.

Mineral resource exploitation oftentimes involves immense capital outlay, which neither individuals nor an entire community could afford on their own (Moshood et al., 2020, p.3). They are subject to massive displacement often accompanying the development of mineral resources, which makes large-scale mineral resource exploitation most detrimental to the local inhabitants of the area. Scholars have argued that the rapid reform of mineral policy has taken place in numerous developing countries, propelling the attraction of significant foreign investment which largely excludes the interests of local communities (Moshood et al., 2020, p.2). Furthermore, mining operations have pauperized communities that are resource-rich through the redistribution of resources. The state regards opposition to the acquisition of communally and privately owned property as a major hindrance to the objectives of economic development.

To secure investors' ability to extract, large private corporations frequently sponsor political candidates of the nation states and influence winners to formulate and apply legislation or policy frameworks that are favorable to the objectives and against the interests of the local citizens (Moshood et al., 2020, p.7). Potential benefits of large-scale land production and acquisition in Africa, for example, are more likely to devolve to the international and national investors rather than the millions of people who are currently using the land that sustains much of their livelihoods, and which acts as a source of their social identity as citizens. The challenges that arise from the investment of new farmland through land acquisition trace to the "weak" recognition by states of poor or absent consultation, customary land rights, and low capacity in compensation to process and manage risky and large-scale land investments (Peters, 2013, p.561). The intensifying class formation within countries further facilitates those with the necessary power to accumulate resources such as land at the expense of the vulnerable and the poor (Peters, 2013, p.557).

Peters supplies examples of land acquisition in Africa that yielded detrimental effects (Peters, 2013, p.558-561). Land acquisition often deprives local citizens of their rights without providing appropriate compensation. Research in Mozambique, Ghana, Tanzania, Madagascar, Ethiopia, and Mali showed that even where consultations did take place, they were dominated by a few chiefs or elders, while the wider community was excluded from the ability to make key decisions. Globally, African farmland prices are situated at the lowest level due to customary rights over the vast majority of cultivable lands—including grazing, common, and wooded—that are not deemed to be full property.

The clear reason for nation states' tendency to set aside the interests of millions of residents as well as small-to-medium-scale producers is the eagerness of governments at national and sub-national levels to claim that they have furthered considerable economic development in subsequent areas. One such example is the state in Nigeria where South African farmers and white Zimbabwean farmers were allocated land for livestock and crop production as a means of promoting agricultural development. However, an analysis of the available evidence shows that vast investments to make production viable through infrastructure were overwhelmingly funded by the state and state-influenced banks. Out of the large loans advanced to the farmers, as of 2011 not "a penny of these loans has been repaid" (Peters, 2013, p.558).

The implications for rural populations and small farmers of such land appropriation by both nationals and foreigners are highly negative, as recent land transfers across the continent have already revealed vulnerability and displacement of rural people in favor of profitable deals brought by foreign investors to governments (Peters, 2013, p.560). The new rush by foreigners to acquire land in the name of investment in African countries is due to outsiders regarding Africa as possessing "weak" land rights, which further spurs efforts to displace people under the guise of spurious public interest. It is common for private corporations to exploit resources by circumventing the due process in the acquisition of land (Moshood et al., 2020, p.5). This is done by convincing the state or the local government to expropriate the land, promising that it would be used in the interest of the public. They acquire properties through cheap means by the instrumentality of the government without fulfilling the promises they made when acquiring the land. Furthermore, the frailty of land rights held by customary land holders propels the dispossession as states' claim over land under customary tenure further facilitates the acquisition of land by private individuals who possess the necessary clout to claim the requisite authority (Peters, 2013, p.559). The role of land policies, whether considered successful or failed, requires further analysis.

Peters outlines how representatives of African states set land rights aside in the name of public interest and development, though more often private individuals and groups are the beneficiaries with the clout to arrange these deals (Peters, 2013, p.557-560). African governments are in competition against other states to attract mobile capital, offering their territories and populations up profitably as factors that are deemed exploitable. Countries where there have been deals for extensive land acquisition include Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana, and Madagascar. The interests of governments and national players in facilitating such land deals include aid and loan packages that often come with the leasing of land, private returns in the form of fees and more indirect benefits from political gains and foreign investments for different authority figures who claim the right to allocate land. Policy determinations are used as a guise championing progress in agriculture such as food production, which depends on a sharp increase in large-scale production if it were to prove fruitful.

Dispossession of Land and the Roots of Colonialism

Resource sovereignty is the right of self-determining people to have the freedom to dispose of their resources and natural wealth. The World Bank has estimated that there are between 445 million and 1.7 billion hectares of potentially "suitable" land that is assumed to be "underutilized," "marginal," or "available" and "empty" worldwide (Peters, 2013, p.557). These are lands that have been classified as public, though the potential for widespread displacement of people and their subsequent livelihoods is clear (Peters, 2013, p.558). Certain extractive techniques like mountaintop removal and open-pit mining possess very significant effects on the community, to the extent that extraction would involve harmful transformations (Stilz, 2019); thus, the community has a moral claim to control it. Despite rhetorical acknowledgment of incorporating existing users of land (almost all of whom are small-to-medium-scale producers), most reports document displacement and the loss of valuable resources for the majority (Peters, 2013, p.557).

Such foreign takeovers have been compared to the actions of European powers that had previously carved up continents in the late 19th century. Models of customary law of land tenure were utilized significantly as instruments of colonial land policies, which are produced in the circumstances following initial confinement and dispossession, serving the colonial government as a justification for apparent defense against further land loss (Peters, 2013, p.544). Just as colonial administrations seek to control land by demarcating areas labeled native or customary, state, or crown and claiming authority over all land, post-colonial African governments have utilized administrative, legislative, and other means to exert authority over territories and their inhabitants (Peters, 2013, p.549). According to Stilz (2019), they take a fundamentally presentist view in which they consider historical wrongs and historical entitlements to be morally secondary and only matter as long as they bear on the current societal structure.

Permanent sovereignty constitutes "the status quo of the contemporary world order" that grants the individuals of nation states an "extensive and often exclusive set of rights over the resources within their territories" (Armstrong, 2017, p.133). Western states, however, oppose the principle of permanent sovereignty. Anticolonial leaders perceive permanent sovereignty over resources as a way to "end the systematic plundering that had characterized their economic life since the age of empire" (Dietrich, 2017, p.3). Control over resources by postcolonial states should be restricted as part of the duties to respect other states' need for access to raw materials in order to contribute to expanding the world economy (Stilz, 2019).

This view is closely linked to that of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitans claim that natural resources are the common heritage belonging to all the people of the earth (Kutz, 2021, p.122). One criticism is that a national claim to oil revenues can result in a per capita share for its domestic population that is far in excess of the per capita share for the global population. A strict cosmopolitan further insists that natural resources must be globally controlled. Cosmopolitanism in natural resources amounts to all resources being extended to the common heritage regime, whether found within national or international zones. Their logic rests on the moral claim that the equality of all persons entails that the benefits of windfall resources should be universalized.

According to cosmopolitans, there is nothing distinguishing the moral claims to oil wealth of a citizen of Nigeria from those of a citizen of Burkina Faso, except for the accidents of colonial borders at birth (Kutz, 2021, p.128). Their reasoning is that there is no rational basis in preferring the principle of national resource ownership to international ownership, “at least for resources whose existence predates the state and in no way depend on it for their maintenance” (Kutz, 2021, p.122). Numerous mineral resources that exist below lands are valued by indigenous communities for their integrity, not just the appearance of that territory itself. Any defensible view regarding claims and rights of indigenous populations should put great weight on the claims that seek to resist extraction, independent of the preferences of the larger stage (Kutz, 2021, p.123). Lea Ypi defends a reciprocity and equality-based account, claiming that what made the colonialism practiced by European states particularly detestable was its violations of standards of equality, including the departure from a certain ideal of social, economic, and political association (Ferguson and Veneziani, 2020). The cosmopolitan ideal accordingly proposed by Kant requires the establishment of political institutions that allow people to regard and relate to each other as equals in the face of the world, with the guarantee that their voices will be heard and that their claims will be accounted for when decisions affecting both are made (Ferguson and Veneziani, 2020).

Another criticism is that it might expose their corporations to the risk of uncompensated expropriation of assets, which would require payment of prompt, adequate, and effective compensation in response to nationalization of any kind (Stilz, 2019). As part of a more general program of economic independence, anticolonial leaders sought control over their natural resources. A key concern of the Western states is the ability of postcolonial countries to alter or cancel exploitative concession agreements which date back to the colonial period, under which Western corporations had won rights to develop (Stilz, 2019). Such arrangements gave foreign investors and corporations—for example the "Seven Sisters" group of oil companies—such extraordinary control over the resources of a host state, conferring on it the right to receive only modest taxes and royalties. Postcolonial states, however, generally regarded these arguments as a shield that sought to continue neocolonial domination (Stilz, 2019).

It can be argued that actors implementing eminent domain are applying tactics previously used by former colonizers towards their own people. First, they deny political communities authority over the rules that govern the use, management, and alienation of resources in their territory. This significantly restricts their ability to determine the social world in which they live. A state is morally justified in exercising political power over a territory and population, and thus enjoys territorial rights, when it performs a number of morally relevant functions (Ferguson and Veneziani, 2020). A state is morally justified in exercising its political power if it provides the protection through policies, processes, and actions that respect human rights (Buchanan, 2004, p.247). The state must also do a credible job of protecting at least the most basic human rights of all those under its power to rule. Thus, a state only possesses a claim to a territory if it meets the relevant criteria for taking the role of a legitimate representative of its people by appropriately serving their interests. Local governments' actions are traced back to the colonial practices previously applied to them.

The most common view of colonialism's wrongness was that it violated the territorial rights of indigenous persons. The territorial claims and rights of indigenous people have been central in the analysis of claims for redress, the wrongfulness of colonialism, and institutional and legal settings (Ferguson and Veneziani, 2020). Osterhammel defines colonialism as the relationship of domination wherein fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are created and implemented by colonial rulers (Osterhammel, 1997, p.16-17). Balandier perceives colonialism as the domination imposed by a foreign minority leveraging its power for material gain (Balandier, 2009, p.54).

According to Stilz (2019), to gain the right to rule a state, including the right to resource sovereignty, a regime must reflect the shared will of its populations as to by whom and how they should be ruled. There must also be protections of essential private rights for all subjects, and these rights must be respected by outsiders. To have a right to rule a territory or population, a state must represent the shared political will of its subjects (Stilz, 2019). Such political will is shared by a group when they are "jointly committed to a common political enterprise and to certain values and procedures by which they believe their enterprise should be structured" (Stilz, 2019).

Second, they have displayed oppressive tendencies that benefit their own private gains through concurrent practices of corruption. Recurrent cases of inefficient projects and corruption in the exercise of eminent domain point to the lack of good faith in eminent domain projects (Oswald, 2008, p.65). Apparent in the haste of expropriating land for resource exploitation, the central issue facing resource-rich countries is that various individuals attempt to divert as much of the endowment of resources as possible for their own private benefit. The "tragedy of the commons" principle states that participants compete to get resources out as fast as possible, before others do, which inevitably leads to overproduction and damage to the area of exploitation, such as oil fields and mining areas (Shaxson, 2007, p.1128). Politicians who are uncertain about their hold on power spend as fast as possible, as much as possible, leaving little on the table for future opponents to grab. It is precisely the revenues of large extractive industries that allow the ruling elites to keep the military and security apparatus happy, repress moves toward greater political participation, buy control, and preclude a decent distribution of resources (McFerson, 2010, p.336).

The political decisions of whether an extraction should be made in a territory should fall on the inhabitants of the territory where the resources are located, weighed against their own conception of the benefits and costs of the extraction. Wear (2017, p.22) argues that a country's resources belong to its "people," emphasizing the matter of citizen control of resources through mechanisms of democratic accountability. In a Rawlsian approach, the primary driver of allocative justice lies in the conception of a society as both morally and economically unified (Kutz, 2021, p.128). Members of the society must see one another as equal and free, extending cooperation in life on terms that are reasonably acceptable to all, notwithstanding inherent diversity in their individual values, aims, and goals.

Avoiding the Effects of Presentism: What Should Be Done?

Social and Environmental Aspects

To avoid the imposition of practices rooted in the colonial period, states should relay the full information to members of the affected communities of any likely harmful consequences that could arise from the proposed developmental projects and the expected benefits, as accurately as possible. This includes social and environmental considerations that must be considered and addressed appropriately. The social aspects of consequences that arise must be considered, most importantly the relationship that indigenous populations have with the land. The relationship between indigenous populations and the land that they inhabit is central to indigenous knowledge systems, including their ways of knowing, doing, and being, as well as their culture and survival (Ninomiya et al., 2023, p.513). Their land is part of their collective livelihoods, wellbeing, and identity, and forms the basis of all social relationships between indigenous individuals. States must be careful not to allow the incidents of land dispossession against indigenous communities.

Such dispossession contributes to a loss of culture and language, interrupting the transmission of generations of knowledge, and becoming the inevitable source of intergenerational trauma. According to the study published by Ninomiya and peers (2023), indigenous populations who have been displaced generally feel loss, loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Racism due to displacement seemingly follows them as they relocate to urban centers. In cases where dispossession does not occur, there seems to still be a detrimental consequence that comes with the use of their land, such as increased vehicle traffic, food contamination, food insecurity, and uncertainty for future generations.

Major transformations of their land bring about consequences that affect ecological communities, including landscape transformations due to construction, such as the clearing of forests, thus leading to flooding and contamination of land, water, and wildlife. Most importantly, how will the developmental project affect the community's harmony with nature? What proactive measures will be taken to improve or restore natural resources, as well as their impacted surrounding areas? In order to preserve the surrounding environment, the habitat of wildlife must be protected by ensuring that resource extraction allows for forestry and sea life to flourish. Furthermore, air quality must be monitored and governments need to ensure that alternative fuels are utilized to minimize pollution when operating vehicles.

Building Good Faith Between Governments and Citizens

Honesty and trust must be maintained by the state should it continue to exercise eminent domain for public good. McFerson (2010, p.347) claims that corruption can be limited with good governance through the implementation of accountability, transparency, rule of law, and participation. This paper proposes four steps to maintain good faith. First, accountability involves the capacity for communities to be able to call upon public officials and inquire regarding actions taken for developmental projects, especially for public revenues and how they are spent and mobilized. Governments must open access for citizens to contact officials to ensure that smooth, clear, and honest communication can be guaranteed. Such communication must be opened both virtually and in person, whichever citizens choose to pursue.

Second, transparency entails honesty for citizens, including low-cost access to relevant information, particularly on mobilization of revenue, the accessibility and quality of public services, as well as the allocation of government expenditure. Reports of public revenues, including the inflow of revenue and the specific ways in which they are spent, must be accessible down to the last detail. Governments can display reports on an official government website for the public to have easy access. Furthermore, such reports should be directly presented to indigenous communities and populations, opening the floor to any questions and concerns that might arise. All decisions affecting the allocation of government expenditure should be monitored by an independent third party to ensure that there is minimized leeway for corruption by political actors.

Third, the rule of law means incorporating formal laws, administrative provisions, and regulations that provide society and the private economic sector with accurate and reliable predictability. Such predictability should be based on existing research and reports of similar developmental projects that have been undertaken, specifically economic results that were yielded from those cases. Parallels should be appropriately drawn from these cases to ensure accuracy. The creation of regulations and formal laws, furthermore, should involve indigenous communities in an open and transparent space where inhabitants of the land can freely express themselves.

Fourth, participation warrants the utilization of government employees, services, citizens at large, and other relevant stakeholders, which are necessary in designing effective programs for the government, supplying the government with information that is reliable, and providing the government with the appropriate reality check that it requires. Most importantly, the involvement of academic experts is crucial in order to take into account existing research and studies.

McFerson also outlines four failures that weaken the pillars of good governance (McFerson, 2010, p.338). In response to these four failures, this paper will propose necessary steps that governments must take to avoid them. First, there is the failure to make a clear separation between what is private and public, as there exists the tendency to divert resources that are public for private gain, for example through corruption by government officials and the clout that surrounds them. Second, there is the failure to establish a clear and efficient framework of rules and law, or arbitrariness in their application. Governments have made the mistake of establishing frameworks that are overly ambitious and less grounded in realistic expectations in order to attract public support and foreign investments, all to propel the gears of actualizing developmental projects. States should instead ensure that such projects are built upon realistic grounds and appropriately strive to meet them. Realistic expectations lead to realistic results, and such results could strengthen the trust between states and the public, as well as trust between states and investors.

Third, there is the failure to set appropriate priorities in development, eventually resulting in the misallocation of resources. Priorities should be based on the readiness of available economic commodities, including commodities such as time, labor, and technology factored into the realization of developmental projects. By assessing the readiness and availability of economic commodities, governments can better avoid misallocation of resources. Fourth, there is the failure to establish decision-making processes that are transparent. Lack of transparency occurs when governments prioritize private benefits over public gains. The involvement of the public, especially indigenous populations and the inhabitants of surrounding areas, is thus crucial. Their concerns and well-being should be strongly considered during decision-making processes.

Bringing unity to a state can be done by utilizing the stock of natural resources (Kutz, 2021, p.137). The stock of natural resources is in itself a chief means for people to realize their collective political goals. Together, indigenous populations should be given the freedom to decide the ways in which they could convert resource stock into national income. Furthermore, indigenous populations should also be free to make decisions about how the conversion provides the occasion for them to work out conceptions of competing values, including the values of resource extraction and environmental preservation. Most importantly, indigenous populations should be able to decide by considering the claims of current and future generations.

One of the crucial dimensions in which political communities might differ is how to allocate benefits over time, with two considerations. First, future generations should not be less well off than the present generation. Second, future generations should be left with resources that are adequate to ensure basic justice in their institutions. Contrary to presentist views, decisions being made now about the rate of exploitation must be outlined following evaluative and empirical judgements about future economic growth, alternative emerging technologies, and appropriate discounting under uncertainty.

Preserving Indigenous Democratic Capacities Through Trusteeship

Dennis Thompson argues that favoring the current generation is a particular feature of democracy (Thompson, 2010, p.17). Most citizens possess the tendency to discount the future, and democratic processes respond to the demands made by current generations, and the laws they produce tend to neglect future generations. There should be a distinction between presentism and the short-sightedness that affects the same individuals over time. The destruction of indigenous land is only one of the many environmental harms that can never be reversed. Even if we do assume that technological progress can compensate future generations in coping with the harm of the destruction, there is no guarantee that they should regard the accumulated knowledge they receive as reasonable compensation for the massive damage done.

The most common reason for discounting or neglecting future generations is uncertainty. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to trace the causes of harms that present states impose upon future states, and no less difficult to create reliable predictions about the policies intended to remedy these harms. Thompson argues that we can assume that future generations will require a way of collectively deciding how they wish to cope with these harms, and what goods and rights they aim to pursue or forgo under the conditions (Thompson, 2010, p.17). The very uncertainty that sanctions doubts regarding what the needs will be supports an obligation for the current generation to try and ensure that they have a process for deciding together, as a collective, what their needs are and how they should be met.

Thompson's argument emphasizes how present generations can represent future generations through "acting as trustees of the democratic process" (Thompson, 2010, p.26). This can be done by ensuring that present generations act to protect the democratic process itself over time. Such acts entail a guarantee that citizens continue to have competent control over their decision-making as a collective. This capacity relies on the continuing existence of robust political and social institutions adequate to support at least a minimum form of democratic government. Thus, citizens or their representatives in democratic states should seek to preserve democratic processes that allow for future citizens to have at least as much capacity for collective decision-making as present citizens possess. Thompson points to how this is a form of political adaptation of the Lockean principle regarding property which grants rights to appropriate land; present democratic sovereigns should leave their descendants enough and as good democratic sovereignty comparable to what they themselves enjoy.

In the case of eminent domain, governments should ensure that there is a clear record of generational lineage of indigenous populations so that governments can continue to involve the indigenous populations in decision-making processes. Rules and regulations, furthermore, must be established in favor of protecting indigenous communities and their right to democracy, allowing them to freely express and utilize their voices in the preserved democratic processes. The establishment of trustees to guarantee the preservation of democracy is crucial. Such an example of trustee establishment is the Tribune of the Plebs in the Roman Republic, which exemplifies the kind of institution that could supply representation for succeeding generations. The tribunes or members of the trusteeship themselves should be made up of public figures with no political ambitions. An office of trusteeship, Thompson states, could be established not only at the national but also at the international level (Thompson, 2010, p.31).

Thompson recommends that some of the proposals to establish a “guardian” protecting the democratic rights for future generations under the auspices of the United Nations would generate an office that could, in effect, serve as a trustee (Thompson, 2010, p.32). Whether at the national or international level, and whether in the form of an assembly or a commission, trustees should have specific powers that allow them to champion the interest of future generations in sustaining a robust democratic process. Specific powers, Thompson outlines, include “suspensive interventions” (Thompson, 2010, p.32), one that allows the trustees to have the authority to stop actions by an executive or legislature that could be shown to seriously impair the democratic process in the future in terms of capacity. Another specific power is the “posterity impact statements” (Thompson, 2010, p.32) wherein trustees would require governments to issue statements that justify any adverse effects their actions might bring on the democratic capacities of future generations. In the case of preserving the democratic capacities of indigenous populations specifically, states should create trusteeships that solely represent the interests of indigenous populations.

Trusteeships must be openly supported by the state itself, and their members must be given the right of expression to full capacity, just as any other citizen of the state. The establishment of this trusteeship for indigenous populations alone is crucial because of the status of indigenous populations being regarded as marginalized and thus disadvantaged. Establishing a trusteeship that focuses solely on protecting their future generations shows that states place great emphasis and care towards indigenous populations, both of current and future generations, strengthening the trust that states have with these communities. Furthermore, existing modern forms of trusteeships should also create stronger and more tight-knit laws protecting the involvement of indigenous populations in public spaces to ensure that democratic capacities are entrusted to indigenous populations to their fullest extent, both for current and future generations of the population.

Conclusion

This paper argues that the contemporary use of eminent domain for resource extraction in developing countries constitutes a form of "soft" colonialism or neocolonialism, deeply rooted in both historical colonial practices and presentist democratic governance. Despite formal independence and international recognition of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, postcolonial states often reproduce colonial logics by prioritizing economic development, private investment, and elite interests over the rights, wellbeing, and democratic agency of indigenous communities. Through the lens of neocolonialism, neoliberal accumulation by dispossession, and presentism, the analysis has shown that land acquisition and resource exploitation today mirror the dispossession, domination, and marginalization characteristic of the colonial era.

By foregrounding the concept of presentism, this paper has demonstrated how decisions justified in the name of development systematically neglect the interests of future generations, particularly indigenous populations whose cultural, social, and political identities are inseparable from their land. Democratic systems, while grounded in popular participation, become morally deficient when they fail to represent those who will bear the long-term consequences of environmental degradation, land dispossession, and weakened democratic capacities. Eminent domain, when exercised without genuine consent, transparency, and accountability, undermines the very legitimacy of state authority.

The proposed pathways forward emphasize informed participation, environmental stewardship, good governance, and the institutional representation of future generations through trusteeship models. Protecting indigenous land rights and democratic capacities is not merely a matter of rectifying historical injustice, but of preventing its reproduction in new forms. Ultimately, resisting the presentist and neocolonial use of eminent domain requires re-centering development around justice, democratic inclusion, and intergenerational responsibility. Only then can postcolonial states move beyond the shadows of colonialism and toward a genuinely equitable and sustainable political and economic order.

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Has the inauguration of the second Trump administration accelerated the rise of China in the Asia-Pacific region?

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Abstract

This essay argues the second Trump administration's foreign policy undermines Washington's claim to normative legitimacy and reduces material benefits of a U.S. alliance. U.S. retrenchment creates hegemonic opportunities for China in the Asia-Pacific. However, Beijing's authoritarian structure and coercive foreign policy limit its ability to consolidate regional power, especially among democracies. The essay concludes, the Trump 2.0 has accelerated U.S. retrenchment, creating a hegemonic vacuum and opportunity for China, however this is not a straightforward power transfer but a fragmentation, with states pursuing increasingly multipolar strategies. Including deeper cooperation with middle powers such as Japan, Australia and western European countries.

This analysis challenges realist assumptions that hegemony is solely about material power. Demonstrating that normative legitimacy, governance through consent, is essential for stable international order, underscoring how a decline in perceived legitimacy can fragment alliances, reshaping international order.

Introduction

The United States (U.S.), under the second Trump administration, has retreated from its role as Global Hegemon, protecting a liberal world order. This essay begins by asserting that Trump's second term administration has decreased the provision of public goods to dependent countries, and enacted foreign policy that undermines the normative legitimacy of U.S. hegemony, both contributing to U.S. retrenchment. Subsequently demonstrating how Beijing has seized this hegemonic slack, desiring a restoration of its historical great-power status. Beijing expanded its political influence by increasing countries' asymmetric economic dependence, and conducted a 'Diplomatic charm offensive', seeking to increase its perceived legitimacy by the West. However, Beijing's authoritarian governance and coercive foreign policy constrains its appeal to democratic states, meaning U.S. retrenchment simultaneously increases multipolar strategies and strengthens mid-power cooperation, such as Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The essay concludes the second Trump administration accelerated China's rise in the Asia-Pacific by undermining U.S. hegemonic legitimacy, however, Beijing's authoritarian political structure and coercive foreign policy limit its ability to consolidate regional leadership particularly among democratic countries.

U.S Retrenchment and the Erosion of Hegemonic Legitimacy

Structural realists, notably Waltz, conceptualise global order as inherently anarchic (Waltz, 1979, p. 89). U.S. hegemony has contributed to creating international stability through undermining credible security guarantees reducing uncertainty and conflict. The declining trust in U.S. guarantees, due to the unpredictability of the second Trump administration foreign policy, promotes uncertainty within the international order.

Equally, Lake (2009, p. 332) describes an analytical framework for hegemony based on social contract theory, stating that hegemony provides benefits in return for smaller countries' compliance with its hegemonic rule. This builds on the realist perception of anarchic international order. The application of social contract theory to international order establishes that smaller states give up certain freedoms in exchange for public goods provisions, predominantly being security guarantees. When public goods provisions decrease, and security guarantees become unreliable, the advantages of U.S. hegemony decrease.

Trump has previously called for "dramatically higher rents... sometimes in the form of direct monetary payments" (Brands, 2021) from U.S. allies, such as NATO members, South Korea, Japan and the Ukraine. Japan, due to their "defence-oriented" security policy (Government of Japan, 2022, Chp. 2), has heavily relied on U.S. security guarantees for protection, but Japanese leadership has become increasingly sceptical, forcing an increase in defence spending to 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2027 (Kosuke, 2025), an unprecedented level in post-war history. This illustrates how the U.S. is "Abdicat[ing] economic leadership in the region for the first time since the second world war" (The Economist, 2021). This erosion of duty fulfilment contributes to an increasingly "multipolar world", in which states are more inclined to "adopt, reject, or redefine outside initiatives based on their own interests and values" (Lust, 2024, p. 138), reducing allied states willingness to defer decisions to U.S. leadership. The increased unreliability of U.S. guarantees and decrease in material benefit provided by U.S. hegemony leads to an erosion of consent and loss of legitimacy. It illustrates how a normative decline in public goods provision undermines the foundations of U.S. hegemony, leading dependent states to seek alternative alliances and hegemony.

However, there has been a longstanding domestic dissatisfaction at the perceived U.S. financial burden of international defense spending, making U.S. hegemonic retreat inevitable. The rise of

'America First' ideology predates the second Trump administration and reflects deeper structural pressures within U.S. politics. Growing public discontent with the financial burden of sustaining U.S. hegemony indicates that retrenchment was not an abrupt departure under Trump, but an increasingly probable outcome of long-term U.S. hegemonic fatigue. As domestic polarisation intensified, support for the U.S. role as the 'global policeman' weakened. This was predominantly caused by the disproportionate costs the U.S. undertook to maintain liberal international order (Son, 2025, p. 1901). This sentiment was evident before Trump's premiership. In 2014, the Obama administration urged "every NATO member… to do its fair share," acknowledging NATO's overreliance on "U.S. capabilities" criticising the "steady [decline] in European defense spending" (Obama, 2014). This demonstrates pre-existing concerns over unequal burden-sharing within U.S. foreign policy discourse prior to Trump's second term, this resentment has only intensified in recent years. In 2024, a survey revealed nearly half of Americans believe the U.S. has no responsibility to help Ukraine and 62% of Republicans consider current U.S. aid to be excessive (Nadeem, 2024). This illustrates the isolationist ideology held by U.S. voters. Whilst the Trump administration acted upon this sentiment, domestic resentment proves a decline in U.S. hegemony was inevitable as U.S. politicians faced a growing discontentment with the post-war international order.

While the 'America First' ideology reflects a long-standing domestic pressure for U.S. retrenchment, the second Trump administration accelerated the decline of U.S. hegemony, and the rise of China through their method of retrenchment. Rather than managing hegemonic decline through gradual-burden sharing and decreased spending, Trump's foreign policy delegitimised the liberal foundations of post-war U.S. hegemony. Trump pursued an "illiberal hegemony" characterised by unilateral foreign policy, coercion and the pursuit of self-interest disregarding the strategic and normative value of alliances that has sustained U.S. leadership since WW2 (Posen, 2018). Consequently, dependent states, faced with diminishing U.S. legitimacy, are incentivised to explore hedging strategies, seeking alternative hegemonic patrons, most notably China.

Effective and enduring hegemony depends not only on material preponderance but legitimacy through consent, "a regional hegemony should gain and sustain its legitimacy, rather than resorting to the imposition of its will over other nations" (Cho, 2025, p. 5). This legitimacy contains a crucial "normative component", rooted in the perceived "desirability" and "rightness" of the hegemonic leadership (Cho, 2025, p.10). Trump's second administration eroded this normative legitimacy by abandoning its commitment to democracy, international law and multilateral restraint. It has resulted in U.S. leadership being increasingly contested because of illiberal actions, such as threats to seize the Panama Canal, Greenland and Gaza, paired with demands for material compensation from Ukraine as compensation for military aid (Son, 2025, p. 1907). This erodes the normative legitimacy of U.S. hegemony widening political and diplomatic rifts between Washington and its traditional liberal allies. This has seen U.S. hegemony shifting from consent-based leadership towards coercive enforcement. Compliance becomes enforced through tariffs, threats and transactional bargaining rather than shared norms. Reliance on coercive power generates significant diplomatic, reputational and material costs, especially when directed against allies (Hurrell, 2005, pp. 55-56). South Korean finance minister Kim Done-yeon criticised Trump's threats to withdraw U.S. troops unless favourable trade terms were met, arguing it was inappropriate to conflate economic disputes with security protection (Stracqualursi, 2018). This reaction evidenced growing resistance by allies to transactional diplomacy. Such practices weaken alliance cohesion and reinforce the perception of U.S. unreliability, undermining the normative legitimacy necessary for effective hegemonic leadership.

China's Exploitation of the Hegemonic Vacuum

This erosion of U.S. normative legitimacy simultaneously creates strategic space for China, weakening the liberal basis of Washington's criticism of Chinese coercion, Trump's illiberal conduct emboldens Beijing's assertive regional behaviour (Goh and Chen, 2026). China's territorial ambitions, particularly regarding Taiwan, are primarily shaped by domestic factors, however, Trump's actions strengthen narratives portraying U.S. leadership as hypocritical and self-serving, legitimising Chinese challenges to its regional leadership. It illustrates how the second Trump administration did not merely coincide with the rise of China in the Asia-Pacific, but accelerated it by undermining and de-legitimising the normative foundations of Asia-Pacific order.

The abdication of U.S. hegemonic responsibilities has produced uncertainty over security guarantees and power holding in the Asia-Pacific, generating a power vacuum China has increasingly sought to exploit. While China had already begun its gradual expansion of regional influence prior to Trump, the retrenchment of U.S. hegemonic commitments during his second term significantly accelerated this process, amplifying China's ascent across the Asia-Pacific. Beijing has expressed an explicit desire to increase regional influence to restore its historic great-power status. It's primarily sought to achieve this through expanding the region's asymmetrical economic dependence on China to leverage political influence.

Chinese leadership has demonstrated a desire to capitalise on U.S. hegemonic slack to increase its regional influence. "China's leadership assesses the current global landscape as defined by the concurrent US descent and Chinese ascendence" (Son, 2025, p. 1899). President Xi Jinping stated "The East is rising, and the West is subsiding" claiming "there is no eternally dominant power in the world" (Jinping, 2025, p. 10). This illustrates how Beijing views this interregnum in world leadership, caused by U.S. retrenchment, as a unique opportunity for Chinese rejuvenation and restoration. Beijing presents itself as a revisionist power, reclaiming their 'rightful' dominant position in the international order, associated with its imperial past. Beijing frames this rise as a national rejuvenation, reversing the perceived historical humiliation inflicted upon it by the West through the "100 years of humiliation" (Son, 2025, p. 1899), overturning the 'pax americana' post-war world order. Washington's hegemonic retrenchment, grounded in Trump's 'America First' ideology, is seized upon as a strategic opportunity to reshape international order as Sinocentric.

Beijing has capitalised on its economic dominance to seize opportunities arising from U.S. retrenchment, strengthening economic ties with Asia-Pacific countries. Increasing asymmetrical economic dependence on China and expanding dependence on Chinese markets within the Asia-Pacific have provided Beijing with larger coercive power over countries. President Xi, during the Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission, claimed China must "strengthen the international industrial chains dependent [on China] to form strong capabilities to deter and retrain external forces" (Jingping, 2020). Beijing's economic prowess and promise of AID is extremely alluring to countries such as Cambodia and Myanmar who are dealing with political instability and in dire economic need. It leads them to turn heavily towards a China-Led Asian order. U.S. withdrawal from multilateral trade frameworks such as the Trans-Atlantic Trade.

Partnership further facilitated Beijing's economic expansion, allowing it to act as a hegemonic substitute. The growing economic dependence of regional states' on China makes governments increasingly reluctant to challenge Beijing on security issues, such as the South China Sea or Taiwan, in fear of economic retaliation. Thus, economic integration becomes a tool for shaping the regional security environment without direct coercion. This is illustrated through Beijing's continued economic support for the authoritarian Hun Sen government in Cambodia, amid sanctions from the U.S., leading to Cambodia's vehement support for Beijing in ASEAN meetings. This resulted in Cambodia blocking multiple resolutions on the South China Sea disputes, with the Prime Minister Hun Manet endorsing "the ongoing strengthening and expansion of Cambodian-China military cooperation" (Sochua and Yang, 2023). Beijing's economic strategy has been extremely successful, resulting in the Lowy Institute proclaiming Chinese outperformance of the U.S., "in its capacity to exercise influence through economic interdependencies, measured in terms of regional trade and investment relationships as well as economic diplomacy" (Luke, 2021, p. 1218).

Beijing has also undertaken a "Diplomatic charm offensive" (Reuters, 2025) attempting to legitimise themselves in the eyes of the West, through alignment with western liberal values. Against the backdrop of U.S. tariffs and renegotiation of free trade agreements, China is provided with a unique opportunity to position itself as a champion of free trade, signalling its intention to reduce tariffs and offer investment incentives further opening itself to international markets. In 2024, Beijing lifted retaliatory tariffs on Australian wine, agreed to resume Japanese seafood imports, and announced visa-free policies for multiple EU countries, Japan and South Korea (Son, 2025, p. 1906). These signals of Chinese openness to international cooperation and trade have proven successful, with Japan resuming military exchanges with China in 2025, and trade ministers from China, Japan, and South Korea convening in March 2025 for the first time in 5 years, also heavily influenced by U.S. tariffs (Son, 2025, p. 1906).

If Washington continues to undermine the value of its alliance commitments in favour of pursuing unilateral transactional diplomacy, Beijing's overtures will carry increasing weight amongst U.S. allies. Increasing asymmetric economic dependence works to consolidate the Chinese position of dominance in the Asia-Pacific, facilitating its rising influence.

The Limits of Chinese Hegemony

Despite Beijing's "Diplomatic charm offensive" (Reuters, 2025) attempting to legitimise their government and align with western values, Beijing remains an authoritarian government. Beijing has continued to improve relationships with anti-west revisionist powers, such as continuing to provide Russia with oil, gas and other mineral resources which other countries have refused to sell since its invasion of Ukraine (Son, 2025, p. 1901). Beijing attempts to uphold a delicate equilibrium of aiding revisionist powers, to divert U.S. and E.U. attention, whilst not aligning itself too closely, to preserve relationships and influence over liberal U.S. allies.

Aggressive foreign policy action, such as territorial disputes over the South China Sea, Taiwan, and crackdowns in Hong Kong and Xinjiang causes countries to become cautious over fully interlinking economies with China (Son, 2025, 1905). Beijing's coercive foreign policy and failure to condemn revisionist powers leads China to lack credibility as a reliable political partner in the Asia-Pacific. This is exemplified through a 2024 survey of Southeast Asian business leaders, which found only 21% were confident China could be trusted to "'do the right thing' to contribute to global peace, security, prosperity and governance" (Seah et al, 2024, p. 56) . This incentivises democratic countries in the Asia-Pacific to look beyond both the U.S. and China for hegemonic needs, and public goods provision. Japan and Australia have strengthened their alliance committing to joint military training and a reciprocal access agreement (Reuters, 2025) reflecting a desire for democratic states in the Asia-Pacific to strengthen regional security cooperation beyond bilateral reliance on either the U.S. or China, illustrating the shift towards multilateral mid level power hedging and diversification of security provisions, rather than sole dependence on a single dominant power.

Conclusion

The second Trump administration has accelerated China's rise in the Asia-Pacific through undermining U.S. hegemonic normative legitimacy. However, Beijing's authoritarian political structure and coercive foreign policy limit its ability to consolidate regional leadership. The second Trump administration accelerated U.S. retrenchment, eroding both the material provision of public goods and normative legitimacy which underpins U.S. hegemony. This encourages dependent states to diversify their strategic alignment in search of alternative economic and security sources. While U.S. hegemonic slack produces opportunity for China to expand its influence, particularly among non-democratic states such as Cambodia and Myanmar, Beijing's authoritarian governance and coercive foreign policy limit its appeal to democratic partners. As a result, U.S. retrenchment has not created a straightforward hegemonic transfer to China, but developed a more fragmented regional order in which democratic Asia-Pacific states increasingly pursue multi-polar strategies, including deeper cooperation with middle powers such as Japan and Australia. There is a strengthening of regional institutions such as ASEAN, and engagement with broader European states to seek regulatory and economic governance rather than hegemonic leadership.

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Neoliberalism and Alienation

(Image credits: White House Photographic Office)

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Student Alienation: A Marxist Analysis

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BA Politics, Philosophy and Economics

Abstract

The crisis of student alienation and the economisation of Higher Education (HE) are interwoven phenomena, with a wide range of existing perspectives suggesting that economisation estranges students from their studies and social lives. However, these perspectives tend either to analyse particular alienating processes in relative isolation, gesture towards a connection without a corresponding theoretical foundation, or ground student alienation in non-economic (often non-material) factors altogether. This dissertation contributes to the literature by analysing student alienation as a consequence of the student's material position within the university, and thus of the economic and structural changes UK HE has undergone since the 1970s. To do so, it draws inspiration from Marx's original formulation of alienation as a baseline framework, and further inspiration from R. Hall's *The Alienated Academic* in locating and assessing alienation in the academic context. By framing the student's position as consisting of two core material roles, that of the *consumer-student* and the *object-student,* this dissertation argues that student alienation emerges from the student's relationship with the university being mediated by these material roles, from both the perspective of the student and institution. This has impacted the institutional policy and academic character of universities, and along relational axes parallel to those described by Marx as affecting the worker, alienates the student from her studies, her degree, and her wider society.

Introduction

British Higher Education (HE) students are experiencing a crisis of alienation. Rates of anxiety, loneliness, and depression are rising (Thorley 2017; Diehl. *et al.* 2018; Ellard *et al.* 2023), campus engagement is declining, and students are adopting an overtly transactional perspective on their studies (UPP 2024). Simultaneously, the neoliberalisation of the modern British university has radically altered the student's material relationship and place within the university, relegating them primarily to their economic status. The relationship between the two phenomena has been alluded to and acknowledged frequently (Côté 2014; Nizioł 2022; Pyyry & Sirviö 2024), but few have attempted an extensive material analysis of student alienation.

This dissertation explores this gap in the literature by materially connecting the economisation of HE and the student alienation crisis. It draws inspiration from Marx's theory of alienation, arguing that the prioritisation of the student's economic role within the university and the impacts of HE economisation invoke similar relational severances to those ascribed by Marx to the proletarian worker under capitalism. In applying Marx's work to contemporary academia, further inspiration will be drawn from R. Hall's 2018 text *The Alienated Academic,* itself a material study of alienation affecting contemporary academic professors.

This dissertation argues that the contemporary British HE student is defined by two increasingly prominent roles: the *consumer-student*, valued institutionally as a consumer of commodified academic products, and the *object-student*, positioned as a quantified opportunity for institutional and individual economic gain. C.1 addresses the crisis of alienation and the trend of HE economisation, examining where connections between the two phenomena have already been drawn and establishing the literature gap that this dissertation aims to fill. C.2 briefly sketches Marx's account of alienation, before drawing out processes of academic alienation applied in Hall's work to academic staff, and beginning to materially locate the student within HE. From there, three core interrelated processes of economisation are examined: the economisation of HE relations (C.3.1), the commodification of the degree (C.3.2), and competition (C.3.3). Finally, the alienating effect of these processes on the student are discussed (C.4), accounting for her own distinct position within the university. By providing a theoretical connection between economisation and alienation and grounding this connection in contemporary HE, this dissertation provides a valuable framework that future research and development can build on, helping to understand and address the crisis at its roots.

C.1: Higher Education: Economisation and Alienation

For half a century, British universities have undergone economisation, as economic relations, motivations and mediators have come to dominate both the university's internal organisation and its relationships to political and economic facilitators, including students, states and sponsoring corporations (Gornitzka and Maassen 2000). Where universities had once been spared the need to be institutionally profitable, funding crises in the 1970s and the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s pushed institutions to adapt to lower public funding, higher demand and productivity-centric political revaluation through an "orientation to the market" (Johnstone *et al.* 1998, p.3) that has prioritised their revenue-generating capabilities and compelled efficiency-minded restructurings. Public funds, which provided near-unconditional financial coverage in the 1960s (Scott 1978), made up just 11% of sectoral income in 2023/24 (Bolton & Lewis 2025, p.26); tuition fees provided around 50% (p.27), and additional sources, such as real estate management and corporate partnerships, made up the rest, tying the university inexorably to private capital (Engelen *et al.* 2014; Baker & Wetherbe 2013).

These processes have impacted institutional functionality. Cribb and Gewirtz (2013) argue that economisation has "hollowed out" universities, stripping away their core social and academic purposes by valuing profitability and competitiveness over "considerations of academic substance" (p.339). Nizioł (2022) and Najafi (2015) similarly argue that marketisation and defunding have pushed universities towards 'McDonaldisation'[1], pursuing the efficient mass delivery of standardised educational 'products' over academic quality and engagement. These products are sold both to prospective students as degrees, and to corporate stakeholders in the form of graduates, patents, and license agreements, driving staff "into entrepreneurial competition for external funds" (Levidow 2000, p.227). Universities will use these measures to directly generate revenue themselves (Castell 2022) or to make appeals to governments for increased state funding (Brazzill 2021), distorting hiring and policy priorities to maximise productivity (Banal-Estañol *et al.* 2023). Budget crises see 'low value' arts and humanities cut first (Moran 2022), privileging the more immediately profitable STEM subjects. Institutions, whether from financial desperation, to encourage growth, or through adherence to policy changes, have embraced economisation, and have adapted accordingly.

Throughout this period of economisation, British university students have suffered a growing crisis of alienation – "feelings of separation, meaningless, helplessness, hopelessness, powerlessness and estrangement" (Hall 2022 p.29), often accompanying declining mental health. Rates of mental illness among students are high and rising (Malagodi *et al.* 2024; Worsley *et al.* 2022), and student suicides increased by 79% between 2007 and 2015 (Thorley 2017). Students are also increasingly disconnected from campus life: 44% feel lonely in university, while 44% engage less with extracurricular activities than they expected and 25% report no engagement at all (UPP 2024, p.6). Academic malpractice is growing increasingly common (Côté 2014; Rahimi *et al.* 2024), as the intrinsic value of learning is being displaced by an instrumentalised perspective on education. In sum, students are estranged from their studies, their institutions, and their social surroundings.

Analyses have consistently linked HE economisation with this growing alienation. Nizioł (2022) associates HE McDonaldisation with the dehumanisation of student and staff alike, born from the "pursuit [...] of mainly making a profit," a "contradiction of the academic ethos" (p.119). Pyyry and

[1] Borrowing from Ritzer (2003), *McDonaldisation* refers to the process by which market forces encourage institutions to pursue efficiency, calculability, predictability and technological control, analogous to McDonalds' pursuits in the food industry.

Sirviö (2024) argue that the instrumentalisation of HE has turned education into an unnecessarily competitive "field of struggle" (p.499), imbuing a sense of "powerlessness and alienation" (ibid.) among students. Researchers at UCL have linked students' worsening mental health to "increased financial pressures and worries about achieving high results in the wider economic and social context", suggesting that both direct and indirect impacts of economisation negatively impact wellbeing (Hall 2023). UPP similarly link the widespread proliferation of "transactional relationships" in HE with increased rates of loneliness, disconnection and apathy among students (UPP 2024, p.3), denoting the "cost of learning crisis" (*ibid*.) as its primary cause. Côté (2014) further connects academic disengagement to the rise of the neoliberal university, as declining academic standards and the student's diminishing intrinsic connection to her studies disincentivises effortful engagement. Across contemporary literature on the topic, the connection between economisation and alienation is well established.

Despite this, few accounts meaningfully analyse the fundamental relation between the two phenomena. Specific accounts of student alienation largely focus on the institution's ideological and hierarchical role in maintaining and reproducing capitalist relations, rather than examining the impacts of changing material relations within the university as an institution (Tsang et al. 2021; Lave & McDermott 2002; Türk 2014). Meanwhile, studies relating to economisation, while often suggesting a connection between economisation and alienation (Pyyry & Sirviö 2024; Côté 2014), nonetheless tend to stop short of theoretically grounding their material relationship, and often focus instead on drawing individual connections between specific processes and consequences, as with Chowdhury's (2018) insightful analysis of the connection between student financing and grade inflation. There is a lingering gap between economisation and alienation. Filling this gap requires revisiting Marx's economic theory of alienation, as his theory provides the framework most suited to establishing a material connection between economisation and student alienation.

C.2: Marxist Alienation and its Application

2.1: Marxist Alienation

Subjective alienation (the emotional, personal experience of alienation) is, as argued by Marx in the *1844 Manuscripts*, downstream of *objective* alienation: estrangement from one's essence, embodied through labour. Proceeding from his analysis of human essence, described later in his *Theses on Feuerbach* as an "ensemble of…social relations" (Marx & Engels 1978, p.145), Marx argues that man's "life-activity" (p.75) – their creative labour – embodies this social, relational essence. Under capitalism, private property and capitalist exploitation estrange both labour and the products of labour from the worker, making them dominating, impersonal forces under the control and ownership of the capitalist. This alienates the labourer from her labour/product, and thus, with labour/products embodying her human essence, from herself. Furthermore, the transference of the hostile qualities of alienated labour onto the owning capitalist drives social alienation, estranging the labourer from her fellow humans. This objective alienation is expressed subjectively: labour is shunned, social relations suffer, and the labourer experiences a sense of estrangement from herself and her pursuits. In Marx's initial formulation, this is a proletarian[2] alienation, born from the wage-labourer selling her labour-power. Capitalism transforms labour, labour products, fellow people and even oneself into something "alien, hostile, powerful, and independent" (p.78).

Necessarily for the present study, Marx's account of alienation holds relevance beyond this strict formulation. While he focuses on the proletariat, *all* classes under capitalism are alienated, though the "forms of alienation differ for each class because their position and style of life differ" (Ollman 1980, p.132). For Marx, it is class society in general, not merely the bourgeoise-proletariat relation, that alienates labour. His analysis of the proletariat is therefore the particular expression of capitalist alienation for that socioeconomic role, but is not the extent of capitalist alienation.

[2] The "proletariat" refers to the majority working-class under capitalism, defined by a lack of personal ownership of capital and the sale of their labour-power to maintain self-reproduction.

Ollman's (1980) *Alienation* summarises the core severances of Marxist alienation as follows:

> *Man is spoken of as being separated from his work (he plays no part in deciding what to do or how to do it) - a break between the individual and his life activity. Man is said to be separated from his own products (he has no control over what he makes or what becomes of it afterwards) [...] He is also said to be separated from his fellow men (competition and class hostility has rendered most forms of cooperation impossible).*
> *(Ollman 1980, pp.133-134).*

These severances comprise Marx's four estrangements: "the relation of the worker to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him", "the relation of the worker to the product of labour as an alien object exercising power over him", "the estrangement of man from man", and, resulting from Marx's perspective of labour as embodying man's species-being, the turning of "man's species being [...] into a being alien to him" (Marx & Engels 1978, pp.74-77). It is these relations that will be examined in the academic context, drawing inspiration from the work of Marxist academic Richard Hall.

2.2: Proletarianisation in *The Alienated Academic*

Hall's (2018) *The Alienated Academic* provides a vital Marxist study of academic alienation. For Hall, contemporary academics are undergoing 'proletarianisation', alienating them from their work, peers, institutions and students. This sub-chapter will explore what is meant by 'proletarianisation' in this context, and extract some key alienating processes of academic proletarianisation.

Hall's understanding of *proletarianisation* refers not to its typical usage – the reduction of distinct classes to flat wage labour[3] – but instead is linked directly to alienation: the reduction of academics to "a utilitarian, dehumanised form of capital" (Hall 2018, p.82) and their resulting estrangement from their pursuits and institutions. For Hall, HE economisation has compelled the marketisation of

[3] In an economic (and relatively broad) sense, academics, as waged labourers, have long been 'proletarian'.

academic output and activity, an externalised efficiency-demanding reorganisation of labour, and the reduction of agents in the academic field to their economic relations. Academic labour-power and labour products alike are "financialised and marketised for their exchange-value rather than their social utility" (p.12), while the academic herself has become "a self-exploiting entrepreneur" under conditions of "global competition" (*ibid*.), atomising the once-social academic pursuit.

Key elements of this proletarianisation include: the standardisation of homogenised curricula (p.58); competition over employment and opportunity (p.82); commodification of education and academic products (p.89); economised "rationalisation" towards efficiency (p.16); and a general experience of "overwork, insecurity and exploitation" (p.xxii). These reflect the severances of Marx's alienation. The commodification of the academic product detaches the academic from the specificity of her labour[4], reducing her studies to their financial value. Standardisation diminishes the academic's control over her work and the potential for expression within it, particularly as this standardisation conforms to revenue generation: academic works become "increasingly homogenised, [...] denuded of [their] specificity" (p.58). 'Rationalisation' entails bureaucratic, corporatised centralisation of power in universities at the expense of academic freedoms and independence (Wolf & Jenkins 2021). The constant need to prove and improve oneself in an increasingly precarious field drives insecurity and facilitates exploitation, while acquiescence to this competition reinforces its hold on academia, at best temporarily displacing one's own insecurity onto others.

The academic experience thus aligns with the alienation assigned to Marx's proletariat. The academic is removed from her labour and labour product, its specificity, independence and subjectivity made secondary to its profitability and managed efficiency. This in turn alienates the academic from herself,

[4] Marx and Engels considered mental and academic 'labour' to be labour proper, and relevant to their studies. *The Communist Manifesto* describes how capitalism converts "the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers," (Marx & Engels 1978, p.476), while Engels' 1890 *Letter to Conrad Schmidt* describes scientists as belonging to "special fields of labour", which remain "under the dominating influence of economic development" (Marx & Engels 2010, p.62).

as her labour exists as a manifestation of her human essence. Institutional domination and intra-academic competition turn one's peers into agents of estrangement, furthering social alienation. Within Hall's analysis, 'proletarianisation' represents the *particular expressions of general capitalist alienation* expressed through the academic's context.

Two main inspirations can be drawn from Hall's analysis. Firstly, the university as a shared space occupied by the student and the academic will necessarily subject both to similar processes, suggesting that we may locate drivers of student alienation by examining these processes through the student context. Secondly, Hall's analysis effectively centres the specific material position of the academic while expressing the general qualities of capitalist alienation through this narrow lens. This extracts the relational quality of Marx's alienation while abandoning its specific expression in the *1844 Manuscripts*; a necessary adaptational extraction, and one this dissertation must also perform. Hall therefore provides suggestions for material processes to examine from the student context (summarisable as the *economisation of relations*, *commodification*, and *competition*), and a model by which Marx's strands of alienation can be recontextualised. However, this recontextualisation requires first materially locating the student within HE.

2.3: Student Applicability and Positionality

Although Marx's overall alienation framework and Hall's particular academic application serve as an invaluable foundation, accurately assessing the material roots of student alienation necessitates locating the student's distinct position within HE. Hall's analysis, though extending at times to the student, is focused primarily on the salaried academic professor, terrain more immediately applicable to Marx's wage labourer. Students and staff may experience similar ideological pressures and institutional barriers with potentially parallel alienating effects, but as their material relationships to the university differ, so must any analysis account for these distinctions, and thus must itself establish the student's material position.

A further examination of Hall (2018) demonstrates that certain alienating pressures are indeed directly shared between staff and student: both are bound to economised, debt-based institutional relations (p.202), and "denied a humane existence" through credentialised socioeconomic expectations (p.178). Metric-based quantification degrades the social potential of intergroup relations (p.82), and both are alienated from their peers by increasing competition for limited security and opportunities (p.124). But a close analysis reveals two distinct, dominating roles the student occupies within HE: their position as a consumer of academic products; and their objectification as 'product' themselves, human capital for the university to leverage for corporate partnerships and state funding. These two roles will be referred to as the *consumer-student* and the *object-student.*

Hall highlights the student's consumer role, though the focus remains on its impact on professors. Institutional reliance on student-sourced income is weaponised against the academic, "played off against each other" by universities (p.166): student financing dictates the "need to drive efficiencies in academic time" (p.91), while student satisfaction metrics are used to recalibrate teaching towards the lowest common denominator of predictable, de-individuated material (*ibid.*). This 'student-as-consumer' projection, drawn from Neary and Winn (2009; in: Hall 2018, p.21), positions the student as a paying consumer of commodified educational products, driven by both the growing economic demand from expanding yet increasingly precarious universities drawing in as many 'customers' as possible, and by:

> *"the intensification and casualization of the graduate labour market, which demands not only students pay undivided attention to their employability, but also, at the same time, prepare themselves for periods of under-employability, un-employability, student poverty and debt"*
>
> *(Neary and Winn 2009, p.126).*

Similarly, Hall's discussion of student objectification focuses again on the impact this objectification has on the academic, rather than on the student herself. Hall decries the marketisation-driven "ideological narratives of student-as-entrepreneur or student-as-partner" that universities leverage for corporate investment as a facet of the coercive environment of contemporary HE (Hall 2018, p.36), identifying student objectification but primarily examining it as a control mechanism on staff. This perspective is suggested throughout: Hall's discussion of oppressive data-driven assessment structures invokes the quantification of the student, "viewed in terms of debt, earnings and satisfaction" (p.82), that makes her "available to prospective employers" (p.119), while his discussion of the repressive, institutionally enforced prioritisation of the "productive development of the human capital of students" (p.17) indirectly highlights the institution's objectification of the student as 'human capital'. Student objectification is identified and acknowledged, but analysed primarily as a threat to the academic's connection to her labour.

Although Hall focuses on the academic, he nonetheless insightfully identifies the role and significance of the student's material position within academia. If the academic's material relation to the university is that of the wage-labourer, comprised at once of economic input and output (labour-power and academic products), the student's material relation is the combination of consumer-student and object-student, comprising economic input and output respectively. Attention to these roles situates the student within economic reality and facilitates a Marxist analysis of her condition. As will be discussed, these roles, both emergent from and influential over policy decisions and academic practice, have increasingly dominated the student's relationship with HE, foregrounding economic relations while diminishing those social and academic.

This chapter has sketched the material roots of Marxist alienation and established the framework through which student alienation will be assessed, centring the material relations that ground the student within HE. In the next chapter, three processes fundamental to the student's economised repositioning will be discussed. These will be the *economisation of HE relations* (encompassing standardisation, rationalisation, and a primarily economic perspective on the purpose and functioning of universities), the *commodification of education*, and *competition between students*. As these processes derive from the encroachment of capitalist profit and productivity demands, they are naturally interwoven, and their textual separation, like Marx's own distinct strands of alienation, should not be interpreted as reflecting separate processes.

C.3: Processes of alienation

3.1: Economisation of Higher Education relations

Contemporary HE prioritises the economic value and character of universities. This prioritisation has impacted HE funding and structures, and has foregrounded the student's economic relationship to their studies and institutions. This is reflected institutionally, where revenue-maximisation and corporate management structures drive decision-making; in the relations between students and their studies, where socially encouraged economic prioritisation removes education's intrinsic value and incentivises disengagement and malpractice; and in the relations between students and their professors, where efficiency and cost-saving measures have distanced the groups through class size increases, course standardisation, and distanced online learning. These relational changes have severed the connections between the student and her academic labour and institutions alike, and laid bare the transactional nature of contemporary HE.

Before the 1970s, HE was rarely evaluated in direct economic terms. Although the economic benefits of an educated, highly skilled workforce were recognised, HE was "primarily expected to satisfy social and cultural demands", with economic gain acting as a "by-product [...] of [HE's] other roles" (Gornitzka & Maassen 2000, pp.226-227). By the 1960s, universities were sites of mass tertiary education, with institutional numbers growing and fees either heavily or entirely subsidised (Filippakou & Tapper 2016; Andrews 2021). However, economic shocks and IMF-enforced cuts through the 1970s eroded institutions' previously robust public support (Vernon 2018), and expansionist HE policies of the 1960s gave way to a decade of state interference and reassessments of the traditional university model (Scott 1978). With the 1979 election of Thatcher and the advent of neoliberalism, funding directives began to shift as profitability, low taxation and marketisation became political priorities (Anderson 2025). State subsidies for foreign students were removed in 1979, and heavy budget cuts from 1981 further reduced HE funding (Andrews 2021). While direct government influence over academic priorities had previously been uncommon (Filippakou & Tapper 2016), productive research was now explicitly rewarded: research grants were separated from teaching grants in 1985 (Anderson 2025), allowing the state to selectively fund specific research activity deemed directly profitable (Kernohan 2024).

These adjustments would be maintained and continued by both Conservative and Labour governments through the following decades. Maintenance grants were steadily replaced with loans during Major's premiership, and, following the 1997 Dearing Report's recommendations, Blair's government introduced £1000 annual tuition fees aimed to supplement teaching grants, as well as effectively furthering all previous Tory neoliberalisation and marketisation policies (Lunt 2008). By 2010, these fees reached over £9000 a year, displacing public teaching funding and saddling students with debt post-graduation, justified by the wage premium qualifications provide (Brazzill 2021). Slowly, HE shifted from a publicly funded social good to a privately funded economic pursuit.

With a £9000+ annual investment and a sociopolitical prioritisation of HE's economic benefits, students thus approach their studies as opportunities for economic profit, diminishing the intrinsic value of education and driving transactional relationships between students and universities (UPP 2024). Economic prospects are increasingly a primary motivator to pursue a degree: UK students are significantly more motivated by post-graduation employment in their choice of university than by non-economic considerations such as teaching satisfaction (McManus *et al.* 2017), while the supposedly higher economic value provided by a STEM degree, both individually and socially, has driven falling demand for and social denigration of the humanities (Donoghue 2008; Ikpe 2015). In his findings that English students (in comparison to German and Portuguese) are "distinguished" in their predisposition to adopt primarily economic motivations for attending university, Bartram (2016) suggests that the "more dominant market-oriented version" of HE in England may contribute to a "heightened instrumental awareness among students" (p.402). Moran (2022) similarly argues that tuition fees, through priming a centrally economic understanding of HE, "sharpen the student consumer's knowledge of the market, increase competition between institutions and curb demand for the 'low value' courses" (p.18). Economisation "subordinates and trivialises education that has no market value" (Lynch 2010, p.62), bleeding into students' motivations and influencing their choice of subject, university, and their decision to pursue a degree at all.

This economised perspective encourages students towards academic malpractice and disengagement. Medway *et al.* (2018) suggest that social economisation and the financial burden of student loans instills in students "a felt need or desire to see a tangible return on that investment" (p.397), incentivising malpractice as an efficient means of achieving the desired goal: in their study, paid essay-writing services, which Rahimi *et al.* (2024) suggest could alone nullify 8-9% of rewarded degrees. The recent rise of AI misuse among students is further evidence of this economised perspective: with only instrumental, economic motivations to study, students are increasingly willing to trade diminished understanding and personal connection for a dramatic reduction in necessary workload (Shaw 2025). Beyond explicit malpractice, UK students are generally academically disengaged, spending less time studying and subject to lower standards than their European counterparts (Brennan *et al.* 2009; Searle 2007). Côté (2014), comparing UK studying rates to US students, finds that institutional neoliberalisation has driven UK student engagement down towards American lows: students' "alienation from the process and product of learning" diminishes the intrinsic value of education (Côté 2014, p.216) while lower academic and oversight standards provide students with "high grades for their low effort" (p.217), incentivising malpractice and facilitating estrangement. The "culture of disengagement" in UK institutions (Searle 2007, p.329) compels students "to simply 'get in to get out'" (UPP 2024, p.3), the distilled consequence of economised HE.

Economisation also takes on an institutional character, as universities come to reflect the neoliberal model and expectations. Under the widespread model of "New Public Management" (Ferlie *et al.*

2008; Tomlinson & Watermeyer 2022), budgets are hardened, quantitative performance measures dominate quality assessments, and leadership is drawn from the business sphere. Accompanying these changes, the vice-chancellor role has grown markedly more corporate, while distinct management layers and a developing bureaucracy have emerged as central to the institution (Shepherd 2018). Amidst this corporatisation and compelled by 'massification' – the rapid increase in student numbers, accommodated by technological and institutional adaptations (Outhred 2023) – student metrics such as attendance, standardised grade attainment and quantified 'satisfaction' have taken priority in policy decisions, structural adjustments, and outward advertising to corporations and prospective students/parents (Hall 2018; Wolf & Jenkins 2021), diminishing the student's subjectivity within the university. Reflecting greater financial and bureaucratic influence, university decisions are made by "associations of policy makers, private equity fundholders, credit rating agencies, technology firms and publishers, and, indirectly, fee-paying students" (Hall 2018, p.54), the latter of which influence policy through their role as market consumers.

This has impacted the student's relation to her institution, as these management structures are more attuned to economic than to academic concerns. Academic independence and research opportunities have relatively declined since the turn of the millennium, with a 60% rise in senior managers and non-academic professional staff from 2005/6 to 2017/18 accompanying a mere 16% rise in traditional academic 'teaching & research' roles, outpaced by student population increases (Wolf & Jenkins 2021, pp.25, 53). Massification within an efficiency-driven paradigm has greatly increased course and class sizes with a corresponding decline in seminar and tutorial focus, often outsourced to postgraduate students as institutions have increasingly relied on casual, insecure labour to plug the gaps (Najafi 2015). Students thus have less access to "those academics who teach but are actively engaged in research – the type of academic who is seen as central to university-level instruction" (Wolf & Jenkins 2021, p.58). In recent years, universities have pivoted towards online learning, the pinnacle of HE McDonaldisation (Carroll 2013), as a maximally flexible and efficient mode of education (Rowsell 2025), further reducing the contact and connection between student and professor and instilling a standardised, "one size fits all" approach to education (Carroll 2013, p.347). Students have had little input in this pivot: while appreciating 'e-learning' as a supplementary resource, students report widespread dissatisfaction with predominantly online-based education, particularly its educational shortcomings and associability (Stevanović 2021; Chakraborty *et al*. 2021; Photopoulos *et al.* 2022). The economised, corporate structure of universities places sovereignty in the balance books, with consequential institutional changes negating the potential for staff-student connections and for personalisation and innovation within studies.

The economic role of higher education has politically and socially taken precedence over academic passion or cultural enrichment. Economising processes have both been driven by and reinforced the student's position as a detached consumer of academic products, as funding alterations drove institutional reliance on student finance as a primary source of revenue. Individually, students have internalised this economisation and have withdrawn from their studies, engaging minimally with educational processes and pursuing the degree as an economic investment. Institutionally, this economisation has driven efforts to maximise cohort sizes while minimising costs: traditional academic roles have been lost in favour of insecure labour and senior management roles, e-learning has steadily expanded, and degree content has been standardised. These processes have reduced the student's potential for academic engagement and lowered institutional standards of oversight and availability, further incentivising malpractice (Rahimi *et al.* 2018). The student's economic relationship to the university is thus foregrounded, as both individual and institutional changes reflect the primacy of the student's financial investment and the university's prioritisation of massified efficiency. Further effects of this economisation can be seen by examining the commodification of the degree, and the impact of this commodification on the student.

3.2: Commodification

Under neoliberalism, degrees have undergone dual commodification. The dominance of profit-seeking[5] in economised HE institutions has created an education market where access to degrees is determined by financial capacity (Hoogenboom 2015). This has led to the first form of commodification: degrees have grown into undifferentiated educational products, geared towards mass production and accessible primarily through purchase. Meanwhile, the marketisation of HE has created self-propulsive feedback loops between misaligned labour and education markets, where credentialist demands among employers, spurned by a supply-side boom, encourage standardisation and the commodification of degrees within a global marketplace (Tomlinson and Watermeyer 2022). This second commodification impacts the completed degree, or more specifically, the qualification achieved through it. Both forms of commodification will be discussed in turn.

As alluded to in C.3.1, the rapid expansion of HE availability, exacerbated by the repealing of cohort limits (HM Treasury 2013) and institutional reliance on student loans, has pushed universities towards massification. Record numbers of applicants are securing positions as the supply of spaces has increased faster than prospective student demand, creating a 'scramble for students' among universities (Rankine 2018). This has substantially decreased the average grade requirements universities require from applicants, as the 'scramble' inevitably looks to lower-achieving students to fill spaces: 75% of applicants with D-D-D or lower A-level grades were offered a place in 2025 (compared with 61% in 2005), and 9% of the 2024-25 intake lacked a single A-level, a near-doubling of the 2015 rate (Henry & Corfe 2026; Woolcock 2026). Within the university, the process of degree attainment has been standardised, reflecting a demand for students to be provided with sure returns on their investments. Declining standards in academic evaluation[6] and an unspoken taboo against failing students (Lambert 2023; Harward 2008) near-guarantee students their qualification, with the vast majority (77.6% in

[5] As public institutions, UK universities cannot technically reap 'profits'. Wolf and Jenkins (2021) note that the preferred term is "financial surplus" (p.22).
[6] As noted by Lambert (2023), the UK Parliament's 'Innovation, Universities, Skills and Sciences' committee acknowledged that "the worst-kept secret" in academia is that "for unseen examination papers, most tutors provide their students with the contents of the paper beforehand", indicating the prioritisation of results over comprehension.

2022/23) passing with honours (OFS 2024): part of an upwards trend of grade inflation unrepresentative of "changes in student and course characteristics" (p.15), driven by transactional obligations for institutions to provide post-graduation employability (Chowdhury 2018). Universities have sought to maximise their student-derived economic inputs, and in doing so, have systemically eroded non-financial barriers to acceptance and attainment. The qualification – honours and all – has become a purchasable commodity.

The UK's rapid increase in graduates since the 1990s did not, as was hoped, lead to an expansion in relevant high-skilled sectoral jobs (McKeown 2026; Holmes 2013). Instead, graduates have been "shuffled into lower-skilled jobs" (Horowitz 2018, p.791). As graduate supply outstrips demand, graduates are increasingly working in non-graduate roles (Xu 2023), from 31% in 1993 to 42% in 2023. But counter-intuitively, the importance of the qualification has grown. The oversupply of graduates without an expanding high-skilled economic sector to absorb them encouraged employers to prioritise graduates over non-graduates for roles that do not require degree-specific knowledge, perceiving these qualifications as markers of a candidate's quality (CIPD 2018). Jobs like trainee real estate agent, sales administrator and shop assistant are frequently listed as requiring, or at least strongly preferring, graduate candidates, locking out non-degree holders who would, in many cases, be equally capable filling such positions (Wiltshire 2025).

The degree's qualitative character is thus rendered irrelevant compared to its value as a generalised marker of a candidate's quality. Its perceived value on the marketplace is non-intrinsic, is subject to supply-demand pressures, and is set and maintained by hiring companies. This in turn has diminished the specificity and particular value of degrees: the actual content offered and education provided is less meaningful than the qualification itself, a standardised marker of a 'good candidate'. Tomlinson and Watermeyer (2022) refer to degree qualifications as "exchangeable goods for competitively sought-after economic rewards", facilitating better job access but possessing "little significant intrinsic economic value on their own terms" (pp.175-176). This marketised homogeneity exacerbates the standardisation of educational content and attainment (Mann 2008, p.77), leaving the degree both in form and content "denuded of its specificity" (Hall 2018, p.58) just as the commodity in capitalist production is made "uniform, homogeneous, simple" (Marx 1977, p.30).

This uniformity and near-boundless need for adaptability is enforced by the contemporary job market, subject to sudden technological or social changes that risk rendering one's field of study oversupplied or underemployed post-graduation. Through the 2010s, 'learn to code' emerged as a memetic phrase referencing the perceived long-term security of IT-based careers (Kelly 2021); within a few years, AI and market recalibrations have decreased hirings for entry-level coding jobs by 50% (Sharma 2025), and demand has shifted to civil engineering, social care and construction graduates (Raval 2026). The chronic misalignment between the education and labour markets leads degrees to be valued less on their actual content, and more for the incidental, 'soft' skills students are expected to learn along the way. A vast range of degrees in humanities, social sciences or business-related fields all demonstrate the shared skills in communication that a PR firm may seek when hiring graduates; physics, maths, and economics majors alike are ripe for an insurance internship. While some degrees, particularly certain STEM-aligned subjects, offer relatively straightforward paths into consistently high-demand careers, most are subject to the whims of the market and the profitability of any given field, valued for the general qualities that a degree *of that sort* is likely to have provided, if discrimination between subjects is made at all.

The degree, the embodiment of years of academic labour, has been reduced to a purchasable qualification stripped of all specificity, individuality and intrinsic value, leaving behind an exchangeable (and increasingly inaccurate) signal of studiousness.[7] Prospective students are approached as potential customers, and non-financial barriers to consumption are demolished so as to maximise

[7] The unsustainability of this arrangement is noteworthy, as the inflated employer-end valuation of a degree is contradicted by the degree's diminishing academic impartment, thus misaligning employer expectations with actual candidate quality. Emerging recognition of this may have inspired recent suggestions of a move towards 'skill-based' hiring (Bista 2025), although the longevity and impact of this trend is still uncertain.

revenue. While educational standardisation and efficiency-inclined course restructurings already serve to denude the degree of its individuality, its subsequent status as an interchangeable, unspecified marker of candidate quality strips it bare of any particular intrinsic value it may have possessed and renders its value entirely dependent on its relative position and scarcity in the labour market. The degree, much like the student whose labour it represents, is reduced to its economic input and output.

3.3: Competition

The relationship between competition and academic development is complex and contested. McGuire (2025) highlights the role of competition-based learning in encouraging engagement and developing lower-performing members of a cohort while stressing the sensitivity of the delivery mechanism in determining the method's impact, while DiMenichi and Tricomi (2015) find further evidence of competition's positive impact on engagement and attention, but found detrimental effects on retention. Chan and Lam (2008) conversely highlight competition's negative impact on self-efficacy, while Kristensen *et al.* (2015) suggest that competition is beneficial primarily when disassociated from significant consequences and implemented alongside co-operative structures. Considering these mixed findings, the strong correlation between competitive environments and stress, anxiety, and depression (Littlefield & Sellnow 1992, Zanzig 1997) should at least temper enthusiasm for competitive HE models, particularly during a global crisis of student mental health (Evans *et al.* 2018). Setting aside the impact of competition on academic attainment, the constant state of material competition that surrounds students throughout university is a prominent driver of student alienation.

This competition is not necessarily for grades. Grades are, in general, standardised to a common distribution, thus making high grades rivalrous: there is a theoretical competition between students for higher marks. In practice, however, this competition is limited, as grade inflation over the past decades has countered this potential standardisation by acting as a rising tide. With over three quarters of students graduating with honours, and with the intrinsic value of a degree diminished (limiting the perceived value of a higher grade for its own sake), grade-based competition is not necessarily a primary pressure on students' academic lives. This is not to suggest that there is no pressure to achieve high marks, nor that this pressure plays no alienating role, but merely that it is not expressed primarily as a competitive drive between students.

Much more persistent, immediate and material is competition between students over current and post-graduation employment opportunities. The modern student is particularly financially precarious. COVID, a cost-of-living crisis and long-term economic stagnation have rendered the typical model of maintenance loan + parental funding unsustainable, with the maximum available loan now expected to cover just half of students' living costs (Barbosa 2025). This has pushed students into employment at far higher rates than previous cohorts. In 2025, 68% of students undertook paid employment (not including internships) during term times, compared to 35% in 2015 (Neves *et al*. 2025). Post-graduation, the job market for graduates is highly insecure and competitive (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011), with middle-income positions and typical graduate roles in relative decline (OFS 2024, Abel *et al.* 2014). This insecurity has rapidly increased the popularity of internships as a safer career route, with over 50% of graduates having undertaken one as of 2025, up 12pp from 2018 (Holt-White & Cullinane 2025). As well as facilitating corporate exploitation – 35% of graduates report undertaking unpaid or underpaid internships – and adding to the existing pressures faced by students entering the workforce during their studies, these limited internships, and employment opportunities more broadly, create material dimensions of competition between students.

This competition has been situated within the modern university. As private funding has become increasingly vital, universities have turned to (and proudly displayed) their paid corporate partnerships, integrating these partnerships into campus activities and competitions (Miller 2018). The University of Manchester, for example, held the *L'Oreal Brandstorm Competition, True North, Accuracy Construction Competition* among several others in 2026, the key prize consistently being an internship position or some form of work experience. These partnerships aim to integrate students into the corporate pipeline through their institutions, as discussed in the preceding section on HE economisation. In this context, competition is directly established within the institution over access to post-graduation employment, further installing a perspective that pits students against one another and perceives HE as an individualised financial pursuit.

More broadly, contemporary student life is overwhelmed by the pressure to ‘stand out’ from one’s peers. Despite signs that overall engagement in campus life is on the decline (UPP 2024), the pressure for students to take on extracurricular roles that benefit their employability remains. As discussed by Chapman *et al.* (2023), where intrinsic motivation may once have driven extracurricular participation, the transactional nature of economised HE has “shifted students towards more extrinsic explanations for participation” (p.139). This encourages students to not merely *join* clubs, but to *run* them, to “fully [exploit] the university experience” (Hinchliffe and Jolly 2011, p.18) and position themselves as a capable leader, financier or organiser alongside their degree. This creates incentives misaligned with typical perspectives of campus community life: if students cannot create a marketable “narrative of employability” (Brown and Hesketh 2004, p. 145) with their activities, then they are misusing their time. This further economisation of the student within HE objectifies the student, diminishes the social potential of student life, and widens the reach of competition into the student’s life.

Facilitated by institutional reliance on corporate funding and compelled by the demands of a stagnant labour market, material competition between students has positioned the students as “human capital”, considered and valued for their employability and profit-generating potential (Hall 2018, p.16). This process objectifies the student, prioritising her productive capacity and reducing her extracurricular activity to its economic significance. This competition is internalised as students acquiesce to objectification, mirroring the materially compelled “self-objectification of the labourer” through their submission to the capitalist labour market (p.89). This pervasive competition dictates the student’s university life, injecting even society participation with the same “ideological narratives of student-as-entrepreneur or student-as-partner” that universities advertise their ‘products’ to corporations through (p.36). Enriching the institutions benefitting from corporate partnerships and advertisable metrics while damaging the student's social and academic capacities, competition further exposes the gulf between the emotional and social needs of the student and the economic priorities of the modern university.

C.4: The Alienated Student

C.4.1: The Consumer-Student and the Object-Student

Before discussing student alienation directly, it is necessary to summarise and discuss the student's position within HE. Economisation has foregrounded the student's material relations to HE, both from the student's own perspective and from the university's, affecting the student's relationship with her studies, degree, institution and peers. The student's dual roles are the *consumer-student*, defined by the impact of marketisation, institutional reliance on tuition fees, and the commodification of the degree; and the *object-student*, emergent from performance metrics, corporate partnerships, productivity demands and labour market insecurity. Understanding these two roles establishes the student's material position within academia, aiding our understanding of the material processes driving alienation.

The consumer-student is built from the student's financial input into the university (Neary & Winn 2009). Their relationship to the university is transactional, assessed not by its educational quality or intrinsic reward, but by how effectively it rewards the student's investment with future financial gain, mirroring the *M-C-M'* model Marx discusses as dominating capitalist production (Marx 2013, p.99). Education itself is deprioritised as the degree neither necessarily requires nor imparts educational attainment, acting as a commodified token of 'candidate quality' to be leveraged for better employment opportunities. The standardisation of syllabi and reduction of subjective engagement with courses reflect this consumer positioning, as these efforts maximise the derived revenue universities receive by increasing institutional capacity while maintaining or driving down running costs, since mass lectures and online-based courses are more efficient to sustain large student bodies. Core to this role is the centrality of the student's financial support of the university, comprising the majority of university revenue and the relation encouraging massification at the expense of academic independence or quality. The student's consumer role is thus "a growing influence at universities" across the UK, diminishing her role as an academic participant (Rizvi *et al.* 2013, p.28).

Simultaneously, the student herself has been objectified, offered up to corporate partners and states as a return on their investment into the institution. Within the university, students are repackaged as quantified, marketable metrics, expected to prioritise their employability and potential as 'human capital'. Corporations working with universities gain access to the human capital these institutions provide, and alongside patents and research results, graduates have been repositioned as another productive output of the university, sold off to vested interests. Social and economic pressures make this objectification willing on their part, as institutions leverage student anxiety and the instability of the job market to construe this objectification as a desirable reward. The objectification of the graduate student thus mirrors degree commodification in the labour market: objectification denatures her academic labour, rendering it undifferentiated "beyond its ability to generate abstract value" (Hall 2018, p.90).

These roles take predominance within institutional management, academic structures and personal incentives. The prospective student is motivated to study by post-graduation vocational prospects and present financial concerns (Bartram 2016; McManus *et al.* 2017). These concerns are reflected and encouraged directly by the universities, increasingly projecting employability and economic opportunity in external communication over more traditional cultural, social and academic standards (Knight 2022). The student's studies are informed by dominant institutional models prioritising mass student uptake and private financing: her classes are moved online; her lectures grow more populated and impersonal; her contact with professors is reduced. Campus becomes a site of material competition as universities facilitate the student's (self-)objectification, leveraging insecurity for corporate partnerships and metric tracking. Upon graduation, employment insecurity and labour/education market misalignment diminishes the specific character of her degree, while parallel credentialisation reframes her qualification as a generalised token of candidate quality. By demanding all actors, from students to institutions, engage in "the individualized pursuit of private return" as their primary activity within HE (Tomlinson and Watermeyer 2022, p.178), material processes of economisation and marketisation have fundamentally altered students' relationship to their studies and institutions, forcing education, social value and intrinsic connection to bend the knee before economic concerns.

C.4.2: Student Alienation

With this analysis of the student's material position, we can identify processes, parallel and often synchronous to Hall's academic proletarianisation, that alienate the student from the same core relations that Marx identified in his study of proletariat alienation.

As the proletarian's labour, undertaken for survival and controlled by external actors, becomes alien and dominating, something to be "shunned like the plague" wherever possible (Marx & Engels 1978, p.74), so has the student's, as her connection to her academic labour is mediated and denigrated by alienating economic terms. Curriculum standardisation, course massification and e-learning have shrunk opportunities for personalised engagement: the growing population of academic courses demands and provides less active input and engagement from each student, and the growing reliance on efficient distanced learning both literally separates the student from her studies and enforces modes of education and assessment designed to be impersonal and rigidly bound. On a more fundamental level, social economisation of HE has replaced the intrinsic value of education with a defined economic assessment, with financial concerns now dominating students' engagement with their degrees. This instrumentalist perspective positions education and its associated processes as an inconvenient barrier to be overcome with as little effort as possible. The student's labour is thus turned against her, education becoming a frustrating obstacle to be avoided instead of an opportunity for fulfilment and self-development.

This separation from their labour impacts the student's connection to the product of their labour, the finished degree (and associated qualification) itself. Commodification has rendered the degree impersonal and unspecific, representing little more than the student's capacity to pay their annual fees, while still typically – and unsustainably – touted in employment markets as a signal of candidate quality, disregarding the degree's contents. Through commodification, the student's degree ceases to be of her, its value and character prescribed by the broad perception of the employment market rather than from its academic content or the student's personal fulfilment. Furthermore, declining academic standards and engagement detach the student's actual labour from this product, diminishing the connection and value perceived in the completed product. There is little pride to be taken in a degree achieved through slacking and ChatGPT; as necessarily entwined aspects of productive activity, alienation from labour and from the products of labour go hand-in-hand.

Social alienation is driven by three qualities of capitalist modes of production. First, the inherently social character of human essence means that alienation from this embodied essence in itself drives alienation from other people (Marx & Engels 1978, p.77). Secondly, the proletarian's alienated labour/product is owned and controlled by an external capitalist class, alienating that class and their institutions from the proletariat as a result. Finally, competition between workers drives them apart from one another, as the safety and prosperity of one comes at the expense of another. Setting aside the first, as this form of alienation is inherent in those previously discussed, the latter are clearly applicable to the student. Decisions around course sizes, study workloads, interactive priorities *etc*. are made by corporate and corporate-adjacent managerial structures, and interactions with the student consider her consumer role at the expense of their social and academic roles. The consequential drive towards massification and e-learning distances students from their professors and institutions further, as opportunities for meaningful academic engagement shrink. The contradictions between the demands of the institution and the educational needs of the student reinforce her powerlessness, whose only significant input into the university is her student loans and whose results and future vocational successes become "marketised or tradable commodities" in competition for funding, corporate partnerships, or prospective students (Hall 2018, p.38).

While massified e-learning enforces physical and social distance between students, it is the economically compelled material competition within HE that fundamentally alienates students from one another. Pressures to outperform other students in curricular and (particularly) extracurricular efforts turn students into "ever-productive, self-exploiting entrepreneurs" (Hall 2018, p.119), positioning individual exceptionalism over social and collective pursuits. This competition is structurally enforced by the competitive, anarchic and unforgiving job market graduates find themselves entering, and in turn by the university's acquiescence to those structures. On-campus competitions over highly valued internships and work experience opportunities provide universities a funding boost from the corporations sponsoring such competitions, exploiting student insecurity and pitting peers against one another. Social engagement for its own sake is disincentivised, reducing the potential for meaningful relationships between students to emerge and disconnecting them from the social spaces and relations that once made up the core of British institutions (McManus *et al.* 2017). Competition, described by Engels as "the sharpest weapon against the proletariat in the hands of the bourgeoisie" (Engels 2022, p.83) thus prohibits social cooperation in favour of profitable individualism, forcing a "break between man and man" (Ollman 1980, p.134).

In sum, the neoliberal university and surrounding society estrange students from core connections within academic life. Severances emerge literally – distanced learning, selective funding cuts – but more fundamentally impact the individuality and intrinsic value of the student's academic pursuits, making her an economic valuation dispossessed of specificity and sociality. Symptoms like growing academic malpractice, declining campus life and worsening mental health can be understood as reactions to this fundamental alienation. The pervasive anxiety that clouds academic life develops from the very material insecurity of the student's current and prospective economic position, and the resulting competition and self-objectification this insecurity demands. Malpractice is incentivised where education becomes a hurdle between the student and the central goal of the final qualification. Declining campus engagement, as well as reflecting broader trends of social atomisation and loneliness, indicates an approach to university dominated by concerns of employability over self-fulfilment or social engagement. Alienated from her labour and institutions, the student expresses this alienation through a detachment with all that university is supposed to provide and represent.

C.5: Conclusion

The crisis of student alienation is bound inexorably to capitalism, demanding profit and productivity from every institution and pursuit it wraps itself around. Treating it as a phenomenon independent of wider economic, political and institutional developments limits our capacity both to understand the problem and to address it beyond individual reactive policies. We may consider it a simple fact of life that students' core concerns revolve around their economic prospects and competitiveness, then wonder why students despair in their studies, turn to academic malpractice, and socially disengage. We may believe it only natural that institutions prioritise revenue and efficiency by pushing all possible engagement online, then try to address declining campus life with course-wide pub crawls and wellbeing surveys. Much as Marx criticised the idealist alienation theorisers of his time for doing, we may "pretend away the alienated character of social life and, as a result [...] capture it only in a mystified way that conceals the real social processes that produce it" (Lave and McDermott, 2002, p.38).

This dissertation has examined the crisis of alienation through a Marxist lens, evaluating the material and economic factors that have driven instrumentalisation, disengagement and poor mental health among the UK student body. Necessarily, it has also established the student's material position and roles within the university, roles that have increasingly defined the student in policy and personal considerations alike. By foregrounding the contradictions between the student's socio-academic needs and the economising processes that disregard such needs in favour of maximising value extraction, this dissertation has developed on adjacent work from Marxist academics while filling a gap in the literature that has generally focused on isolated relations or universities' ideological and hierarchical roles. It suggests a continued and even expanded relevance of Marx's assessment of proletarian alienation: even in the absence of a direct wage worker-capitalist relationship, marketisation and commodification drives alienation from one's labour/products, society and, ultimately, self.

Significant further research would be required on this topic before practical suggestions could be made. Nonetheless, some general conclusions emerge. Most evidently, addressing the crisis will require changing the student's structural and material position within the university. This may require exploring alternate funding models, intentionally curtailing massification, expanding the student's input beyond their financial patronage, or even more radical re-evaluations of the student role. More broadly, a reappraisal of the political and social conversation around HE, going beyond HE's economic benefits, may encourage greater campus and academic participation; a lack of accompanying policy changes, however, would maintain the same material incentives driving instrumentalisation, limiting the impact of a discourse-led intervention.

Although this dissertation has focused on the alienating effects of economisation, future conversations must account for the positive effects of these processes, such as financial gain, accessibility, and flexibility in engagement, and thus the trade-offs inherent to adjustments. The diverse, non-specific marketability of a degree may drive alienation from one's studies due to their apparent irrelevance to a degree's 'purpose' of economic gain, whilst simultaneously preventing students from being "locked in" to a career by providing a greater range of potential paths. Processes also cannot be evaluated in isolation: diminishing entry requirements may relate to the wider commodification of HE, but in themselves can help expand access to education. Simply negating processes or reversing individual decisions is no panacea. Nonetheless, to address the crisis of alienation and reprioritise the academic and social aspects of HE, politicians and institutions alike must be prepared to tackle the roots of the crisis head on.

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Identity Politics

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Gender, Necropolitics, and the Nuclear Legacy of Semipalatinsk

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Abstract

Nuclear imperialism, or the "domination of one group, nation-state, or ideology by another, through nuclear means," (Broinowski 2015 cited in Alexis-Martin 2019, p. 153) is a modern vehicle of colonialism. For nuclear testing to be justified, the population at risk must be dehumanised to justify asserting a "living death" (Mbembe 2003) onto them. In this paper, I focus on the Soviet nuclear project in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, using theoretical perspectives, scientific data, and governmental reports in my analysis. I argue that this was a gendered, necropolitical venture, as nuclear testing specifically targeted and harmed Kazakh mothers. I assert that the "coloniality of gender" (Lugones 2016) was a necessary precursor to necropolitics in the Kazakh Steppe, as it deemed racialised women the least worthy of life and thus expendable. This paper contributes to political scholarship, as it reveals the coloniality behind nuclear intelligence and the violent, gendered dynamics that justify weapons testing.

Introduction

In the last century, colonialism has expanded its scope and has taken on new identities in order to capitalise on modern opportunities to obtain power. Such evolution has manifested in nuclear imperialism, which is "characterized by the capitalist formation, intervention and militarization of space," as well as the "domination of one group, nation-state, or ideology by another, through nuclear means" (Broinowski 2015 in Alexis-Martin 2019, p. 153). In ventures of extraction and testing, oppressive nations have proceeded with colonial logics that justify the exploitation of certain bodies over others. In this essay, I argue that the Soviet Union engaged in a gendered form of necropolitics in its nuclear project in Kazakhstan. I assert that Maria Lugones' (2016) coloniality of gender serves as a prerequisite for necropolitics in the Kazakh Steppe. Her framework communicates that the omnipresent gender order we live under today was employed as a colonial tool that created a hierarchy to benefit white, heterosexual men. It devalued white women, positioning them as subordinate to men, but effectively dehumanised women of colour and framed them as undeserving of dignity. Thus, it ranked individuals by their disposability, with white men holding the most value and racialised women holding the least, considering them the most available for inhumane exploitation. In this hierarchy, white women fit in second place, and racialised men in third.

This essay will explore the Soviet nuclear project in Kazakhstan as a gendered-necropolitical venture in three sections. To begin, an understanding of the Kazakh Steppe as one of Mbembe's (2003) "death-worlds" will be established. These require the coloniality of gender as a necessary precursor to their formation, as individuals must be dehumanised before a sovereign can assert a "living death" (Mbembe 2003) onto them. Secondly, after exposing them to nuclear warfare, the USSR engaged in secretive scientific experimentation on the poisoned Kazakhs. Through Cohn's (1987) technostrategic language, we can understand the empirical and detached idiom employed by the scientists as enacting further violence. Not only were the Kazakhs used as data points by the USSR, but the Soviet Union knowingly continued to wreak nuclear havoc upon their land, despite evidence showing significant illnesses in the population. Finally, this essay will return to the coloniality of gender and explore how nuclear research specifically targeted mothers, the most vulnerable population to radiation poisoning. These women were not helped by the USSR but rather treated as reproductive entities to test radiation's effects on fertility and growing foetuses. As will be seen in this essay's conclusion, radioactive necropower has a legacy in Kazakhstan decades later.

A Colonial History

The relationship between Kazakhstan and the USSR must first be understood as a colonial one. To provide a brief amount of context, "in the first half of the 18th century, facing extended wars with their Eastern neighbors from China, Kazakh tribes requested to become a protectorate of the Russian Empire. Through the 19th century, the Russian emperors gradually transformed the protectorate status of the Kazakh Steppes into that of a colony through a series of political and administrative reforms and military interventions" (Aldashev & Guirkinger 2017, pp. 415–416). This colonialism led to the destruction of the clan system and nomadic pastoral life that the Kazakhs had previously enjoyed, as territorial rulings in 1891 mandated that individuals had to engage in fixed, full-time land cultivation to have property rights (Aldashev & Guirkinger 2017). As a result, extended families in a clan who could previously access the land for certain established seasons were no longer able to use it. From here, clan systems quickly became detached, and families began operating, ironically, on a nuclear system, with each household providing solely for itself (Aldashev & Guirkinger 2017, p. 418). This also led many individuals who did not have sovereign farmland to enter the workforce, which was seen to culminate in employment in uranium extraction sectors in the following decades (Aldashev & Guirkinger 2017, p. 422). Thus, colonialism deeply weakened the economic and familial systems in Kazakhstan and led the population to depend on the Soviet-made workforce. From here, the USSR was able to effectively continue its colonial practices in the creation of its nuclear project.

Creating The Death World

To legitimise the violence perpetrated in colonial ventures, such as nuclear imperialism, the sovereign power must categorise those it harms by the worth of their lives. This ranking system is understood by Lugones as the coloniality of gender, a hierarchical order inherent to colonialism which methodically places all individuals subordinate to white, male colonisers. It characterises white women as weaker, less intelligent, and ultimately unequal to white men, secluding them from "the sphere of collective authority, from the production of knowledge," and "from most of control over the means of production" (Lugones 2016, p. 32). However, positioned beneath these women are colonised individuals, who are dehumanised to be effectively exploited. At the intersection of race and gender lie women of colour, who in this ranking do not possess the masculine traits of intellect and strength, nor the feminine characteristics of purity and innocence. Therefore, on what Lugones understands as the "dark" side of the colonial gender order, racialised women have not only been pushed out of the public sphere but also reduced to animals. Possessing neither femininity nor masculinity according to the colonisers, they have historically been effectively de-gendered and subjected to the most violent existence at the hands of white men.

This "social ladder where whiteness and masculinity are at the top, and racialized women are at the bottom" (Velasco Ugalde 2023, p. 13) creates a dynamic in which violence can be justified. As Coates (2025) explains in his review of Mbembe, this ordering creates "hate" and "enmity" for the racialised (and gendered) other, providing legitimacy for the coloniser "to control life and death" for its subjects (Velasco Ugalde 2023, p. 11). Those dehumanised and "shorn of human dignity" (Coates 2025, p. 67) become available for violence. As Kazakhs were already considered sub-human colonised subjects, the shift to exercising nuclear-necropower on them became easy. Expanding off the coloniality of gender's established hierarchy, necropolitics began to operate and a death-world was created in Semipalatinsk, a steppe in northeastern Kazakhstan. Mbembe's (2003) death-worlds are "defined by their attempts to contain groups of people who have been consigned to a status less than that of the living. They are spaces proximate to death" (Coates 2025, p. 68). Death, in the Kazakh Steppe, was an omnipresent threat and could come at any time for the nuclear subjects. Necropower takes on an additional form in the USSR nuclear project, as after the Kazakhs were exposed to radiation, they became test subjects for the Soviet Union in a necropolitical laboratory.

The Necropolitical Laboratory

While the USSR had multiple "medical offices," or laboratories, in the Kazakh Steppe, the most famous and notable of those is Dispensary no. 4. In documentation, this site is code-named "brucellosis hospital" (Bauer 2019, p. 501), and information regarding its purpose remained shrouded in secrecy for decades. However, unbeknownst to the affected population, this institution served as the base for "the study of radiation exposure and effects in the areas surrounding the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site" (Bauer 2019, p. 501). This experimentation was documented in the Atchabarov Report, which is immersed in patriarchal empirical language. It "is written in a strictly scientific tone and builds up piece by piece, table by table, graph by graph a documentation of effects to arrive at quite drastic conclusions" (Bauer 2019, p. 499). These findings include "observed alterations in the health of people" due to "chronic radiation disease" (Bauer 2019, p. 500). Despite very clear evidence, the USSR officially rejected this report and decided to continue testing the Kazakh population, without employing any means to address their illnesses.

In the following years, empirical practices created more distance between the researchers and the Kazakhs. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, scientists embarked on short "expeditions" to the Steppe to assess developing cancer rates of their "epidemiological cohort" (Bauer 2019, p. 502). The researchers became "detached from the lives of those needed to cope with actual radiation exposure, even if they were motivated by the assessment of health risk to the population in the first place" (Bauer 2019, p. 504). The likening of the Kazakh population to data points, alongside the "scientific tone"

(Bauer 2019) used in the Atchabarov Report, removed the scientists "from the reality behind the words" and served as a "form of abstraction" (Cohn 1987, p. 708), distancing them from reality. This idiom is comparable to the technostrategic language used in the U.S. to sanitise and normalise nuclear weaponry. As Carol Cohn states, employing pragmatic, dispassionate language gives one the sense of control. In her experience observing defence analysts, it created a sense of "cognitive mastery" (Cohn 1987, p. 704) over deadly technology. In the context of Semipalatinsk, such language gave scientists the feeling of superiority over and distance from the Kazakh people, who were equated to manipulatable statistics. The coloniality of gender resurfaces in empirical language, which empowers the researchers and desensitises them to the inhumane experiments they were conducting, and simultaneously reestablishes the Kazakhs as less than human. Continuing with Lugones' theory, nuclear testing and research is seen to specifically target colonised women.

Exploitation of the Mother

Standing at the intersection of race and gender, subjugated women of colour possess neither masculinity nor femininity in the colonisers' eyes. Thus, they become de-gendered and therefore available for the most sadistic forms of violence. However, after effectively de-gendering Kazakh women to conduct lethal nuclear tests on their land, the Soviet Union re-gendered them in scientific experimentation. As Lugones explains, under the coloniality of gender, "women racialized as inferior were turned from animals into various modified versions of 'women' as it fit the processes of Eurocentered global capitalism" (Lugones 2016, p. 28). Here, this modification of their female identity did not humanise them but rather situated them as reproductive entities holding valuable sources of information in their wombs.

After decades of study on radiation's effects, it has been found that "female adults, children, and pregnancy, in particular, are more susceptible to this damage, making even low doses with supposedly low risk a greater concern" (Folkers 2021, p. 33). Folkers explains this could be due to a connection between oestrogen and radioactivity, which may "have many cancer causation pathways in common" (p. 38). As oestrogen greatly increases during pregnancy, Kazakh mothers were the most vulnerable population to radiation poisoning in Semipalatinsk. Thus, they became valuable research subjects. Soviet scientists, and later those of the former Soviet Union, have conducted many tests on the radiation exposure of both mothers and babies in utero.

Even though access to the Atchabarov Report is not available, there is other published evidence pertaining to the Soviet context. In Belarus, following the Chernobyl nuclear accident south of its border, Dr. Bandazhevskaya and Dr. Bandazhevsky "discovered cardiac disorders developed in children whose bodies contain an average of 10–30 becquerels (Bq) per kilogram (kg) of radioactive cesium" (Folkers 2021, p. 40). "Becquerel" is the international measure for radioactivity, and "cesium" is the byproduct of nuclear weaponry, which emits radiation as it breaks down. These statistics are concerning, as "these doses have resulted in increased frequency of disease, death, and a decline in fertility" (Folkers 2021, p. 40), with a dose of "just over 50 Bq per kg" resulting in total tissue death. Furthermore, testing at Chernobyl found "significantly increased rates of conjoined twins, teratomas, neural tube defects, microcephaly, and microphthalmia among populations" (Folkers 2021, p. 41). While Chernobyl was the site of a single, catastrophic disaster, radiation exposure was constant in Semipalatinsk and proliferated for forty years. The Kazakh mother as a colonial target was not treated as a human who should be protected here, but as an undignified other that can be experimented on.

Radioactive Necropower's Legacy: Concluding Thoughts

Radiation can now be understood to specifically target gendered bodies. In the Kazakh Steppe, the population subjected to the most harm was colonised women. Once again, the coloniality of gender forms the basis of a necropolitical understanding of the Soviet nuclear project. To justify their weapons testing, the Soviet Union preserved the gendered and racialised hierarchy that was created to originally colonise the Kazakh population. In the following years, the coloniality of gender then aided in the establishment of a necropolitical lab in Dispensary no. 4. Once aware of the mothers' vulnerabilities to radiation poisoning, the scientists effectively re-gendered Kazakh women simply as reproductive entities for data collection. After extracting information from their wombs, they were left in the radiation zone, uninformed about the impacts on their health. From here, necropower's legacy emerges, as the state forces the morbidly heartbreaking responsibility of raising gravely ill children upon the women. Radioactive necropower succeeds in reducing the Kazakh population through poisoning, and in instilling a deep fear of reproduction amongst its women. Thus, as this essay deduces, the Soviet nuclear project was deeply necropolitical and deeply gendered. For further research, Puar's (2017) understanding of "maiming" in the Palestinian context, and Nixon's (2011) "slow violence" should be applied to dissect the nuclear-necropolitical legacy in Kazakhstan following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

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The Political Power of Faith:

Religious Influence in the 2016-17 Jakarta Election

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Abstract

This essay examines how religious beliefs shape political behaviour by analysing the 2016-17 Jakarta gubernatorial election. It argues that religion operated not merely as a theological reference point, but as a strategic political tool that provided ontological security, mobilised emotive appeal, and reshaped public understandings of legitimacy. Through the delegitimization of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), religion was used to sacralise identity and frame political contestation as an existential threat to the moral order. Conversely, rival candidates drew on religious narratives to stabilise uncertainty and cultivate moral reassurance, demonstrating religion's dual capacity to delegitimise and legitimise political authority. In the context of Indonesia, its formal commitments to pluralism alongside strong Islamic social norms reveals how democratic competition can be driven by shared moral narratives as much as by political performance. Understanding these dynamics highlights the institutional and emotive power of religion in sustaining political legitimacy within democratic systems.

Introduction

Religion has long been recognised as a potent force in politics, capable of shaping identities and mobilising collective action. This essay argues that religious beliefs are strategically used as tools for ontological security and emotive appeal in politics. Through the case study of the 2016-17 Jakarta gubernatorial election, this essay demonstrates how religion was used to reshape political identity and monopolise the truth, without the formal suspension of democratic norms. It enabled the imprisonment of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) and gave moral leverage for other candidates. This case study is particularly instructive because Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority democracy, formally upholds religious pluralism while simultaneously sustaining strong Islamic social norms. This essay proceeds in three sections. First, I clarify how religion is conceptualised and examine its political role within the Indonesian context. Second, I analyse how religion mobilised delegitimisation, constructing Ahok as a moral threat. Third, I explore how religion can also be used for legitimation, which in this case leveraged other candidacies in the election, before reflecting on the broader implications for democracy and pluralism in Indonesia. This analysis does not promote Islamophobic interpretations, rather, it critically examines how religion becomes an apparent political tool within democratic systems.

Conceptualising Religion and Its Contextual Background

In this essay, religion is understood not simply as a private spiritual practice, but as a socially embedded system of beliefs and tradition that shapes identity, ethics, and perceptions of order (Mandaville 2025, p. 379). The source of religion itself is located beyond human or natural agency which grants religious claims a sense of permanence and transcendence that is difficult to contest through purely rational means (Kinnvall 2004, p. 759). Meanwhile, it provides a moral framework through which communities interpret legitimacy, authority, and belonging. This understanding allows religion to function as a tool to transform political disagreements into moral imperatives.

To analyse how this transformation occurs in practice, this essay draws on two key theoretical concepts, which are ontological security and emotive appeal. Ontological security refers to the security of being (Giddens 1991), where one possesses a stable sense of self and continuity in the face of uncertainty. A nation's ontological security is composed of many factors, one of which is religion. This is because when political change, elites, or social diversity is perceived as threatening moral order, religion can offer reassurance by affirming fixed identities and moral boundaries (Kinnvall 2004, p. 755); securing a stable sense of self. Alongside this lies emotive appeal. Evolving from Marcus' study of emotions in politics, emotive appeal can be defined as a strategy to win political support by eliciting emotional responses from the intended recipients (Marcus 2000, p. 222). It mobilises responses such as fear, anger, or pride, rather than policy-based reasoning which are in cases more effective to push political agendas. When ontological security is challenged, these emotional responses often intensify, producing defensiveness that can lead to the sacralisation of identity. This occurs when political identities are infused with religious meaning (Magcamit 2020, p. 688), rendering them morally absolute and resistant to compromise.

Indonesia provides fertile ground for this form of religious mobilisation due to the way religion is embedded institutionally and socially. The Indonesian state endorses religious pluralism through the ideology of *Pancasila*, recognising six official religions and formally guarantees freedom of belief (Republic of Indonesia 1999). However, this framework presents a state-managed pluralism. While all recognised religions are formally "equal", informal hierarchies persist. With 87% of Indonesians being Muslim (Stirling 2024), they occupy a dominant cultural and political position. This produces tension between constitutional pluralism and everyday political practice, where non-Muslim identities remain the "othered" minority. Despite a democratic system, Islamic organisations have played a central role as moral authorities in Indonesia (Epley and Jung 2016, p. 55). They shape public norms regarding morality, education, leadership, and legitimacy in line with their religion. Aceh, for instance, illustrates how religion operates as a governing framework as they govern simultaneously with Islamic Law or

Shari'ah (Siregar 2008, p. 144). This reinforces the idea that moral order is inseparable from religious authority and is intertwined with governance structures and public expectations.

This religious force is visible in contemporary politics and social norms. High-ranking political figures (e.g. president or vice president) in Indonesia have overwhelmingly been held by Muslims, raising the perception that religious identity is a prerequisite for national leadership. Even in pop culture and media, public figures who convert to Islam are often celebrated as morally improved, gaining fame from it; while those who move away from Islam frequently face backlash. These patterns signal that religion functions as a marker of trustworthiness and social harmony, shaping public perceptions of legitimacy well beyond formal institutions. Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that religion's political power in Indonesia is not accidental or a phase, yet embedded. This context is essential to understand how religion was mobilised in Jakarta's gubernatorial election.

Religion as Delegitimisation

In the case of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), religion functioned as a primary mechanism for political mobilisation through emotive politics. This process transformed the 2016-17 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election from a contest over governance into a moral and religious imperative, ultimately contributing to Ahok's electoral defeat and imprisonment (Nastiti and Ratri 2018, p. 197). Rather than operating through formal political parties, religious mobilisation relied on moral authority, narratives and everyday social pressure to redefine political legitimacy.

Prior to the religious controversy, Ahok was a political figure widely recognised for his directness, but also a strong governance record, including bureaucratic reform, infrastructure development, and a firm anti-corruption stance. His leadership style emphasised accountability and efficiency, which appealed to many voters in Jakarta (Warburton and Aspinall 2019, p. 259). At this stage, his political legitimacy is derived primarily on policy outcomes and competence. Despite this, Ahok's identity markers were never entirely absent. As a Chinese-Indonesian, Christian, and elite figure, he occupied multiple positions within Indonesia's Muslim-majority political landscapes. However, these identity markers existed as background vulnerabilities rather than decisive obstacles; it did not override his performance. This indicates that identity difference alone was insufficient to delegitimise Ahok, and it became politically influential, only once it was reframed as a religious threat.

The turning point occurred following Ahok's speech referencing *Al-Maidah* 51, which was rapidly reframed and edited as an insult to Islam (Nastiti and Ratri 2018, p. 203). What had initially been a political statement concerning electoral manipulation through the use of mis-interpreting the *Quran*, turned into an act of blasphemy. The controversy no longer concerned what Ahok meant in political terms, but about the perceived insult to Islam itself. The framing of Ahok committing blasphemy positioned the religion Islam, and its followers as being under existential threat; generating fears of moral disorder and erosion of identity. This is where ontological security takes part. Feeling like Islam's moral security is attacked, mass protests against Ahok occurred, most notably being the *Aksi Bela Islam* rallies and the *212* movements, responsible for transforming public pressure into institutional outcomes (Alkatiri 2023, p. 3).

These demonstrations displayed collective Islamic pride and political power, reinforcing a shared moral identity grounded in religious solidarity. This is only made possible through emotive appeal, as these movements prioritised anger and fear rather than Ahok's action itself. Communities used emotive narratives, emphasising humiliation and disrespect to mobilise the idea that Ahok is not a political rival, but a moral and religious threat to Islam. It creates the public sentiment that: to defend Islam was to oppose Ahok. Religious leaders and organisations further circulated narratives that it was sinful to elect a non-Muslim leader. Thus, in this context, religion became a site of existential defence rather than belief alone, leading political action in the pursuit of ontological security.

As riots turned to prosecution, Ahok was convicted under Indonesia's 'blasphemy law' and sentenced to two years in prison (Alkatiri 2023, p. 6). This illustrates how religion was institutionalised within the political process as it enabled moral claims to acquire formal authority. While the 'blasphemy law' is designed to preserve inter-religious harmony, in practice, it operates as a political instrument that reinforces dominant religious parties and public sentiment. Ahok's legal process was deeply shaped by public pressure and mass mobilisation, raising questions about its legal necessity. The conviction served more as a meaning to reaffirm moral order in the face of perceived transgression. In this sense, religion redefined political legitimacy by utilising moral boundaries that policy could not cross. In the process, it's important to highlight that democracy was not suspended, but constrained from within. Furthermore, this reconfiguration of legitimacy sets the stage for understanding how other candidates benefited from the same religious dynamics.

Religion as Legitimation

If the delegitimisation of Ahok in the election was driven by fear, outrage, and moral panic, the success of his rivals depended on offering a sense of security. Following the intense religious mobilisation, voters increasingly sought stability and moral reassurance rather than policy innovation. The political environment had been saturated with anxiety over religious insult and moral disorder, creating a demand for leadership that could symbolically restore harmony; at least as defined by the religious majority. At this stage, ontological security shifted from the defensive impulse to "protect Islam" towards the desire to re-establish certainty through electoral choice. Voting became a means to choose which candidate felt safest religiously and existentially. Religion therefore functioned not only as a mobilising force against Ahok, but as an emotive tool through which rivals can benefit from.

Anies Baswedan, Ahok's principal rival, was positioned as a morally safe alternative through subtle yet effective self-advertisement and religious signalling. Rather than engaging in overtly extremist rhetoric, he was presented as a devout Muslim, culturally embedded within Jakarta's Islamic base, and non-confrontational in tone (Sulistiyanto 2018, p. 160). He is seen as the complete opposite of Ahok, and this positioning allowed Islamist mass organisations to engage more around him without requiring explicit endorsement of hardline agendas. This approach allowed him to maintain broad electoral appeal while simultaneously benefitting from the moral authority of Islamic organisations. Drawing back to emotive politics, rather than mobilising anger and fear, religious narratives surrounding Anies elicited emotions such as trust, belonging, and social harmony. These responses were collective and evident through sermons, social media, and community gatherings. Faced with social pressure, voters were then offered a clear and emotionally resonant formula to affirm ontological security: a Muslim leader equated moral safety (Kinnvall 2004, p. 758). Political choice became embedded in shared sentiment rather than individual deliberation. Religion thus reshaped the evaluative criteria of governance itself, prioritising emotional security over administrative capability.

As emotional security gradually replaces policy competence as the stronger basis of political judgment, religious actors were able to endorse electoral choice accordingly. Through theological framing, these groups framed the election as a religious test, urging voters to support a Muslim leader and avoid committing a "sinful act" (Nastiti and Ratri 2018, p. 198). Crucially, this process relied less on political parties and more on mass religious organisations, whose deep social reach enabled them to constitute what was considered "right" and "wrong", transforming the election to an act of religious obedience. Of course, minority religious groups; Christians, Catholics, Hindu, Buddhist, Confucianism, and even some Muslim communities argue against this framing. However, their voices were overridden by the widespread emotive appeal that dominated the majority of Jakarta's citizens.

This further proves that religion did not overthrow democracy in the Jakarta election. Elections were held and votes were cast. However, religious mobilisation fundamentally reshaped democratic competition from within. Ontological security became crucial in offering voters a sense of solid ground, and in this case, morality defined through religious identity outweighed governance outcomes and policy debates. Having delegitimised Ahok through moral grounds, religion legitimised other candidates by enabling the promise of moral reassurance. This demonstrates how democracy can be profoundly reshaped by religious beliefs without being formally suspended.

Conclusion

This essay has explored how religious beliefs in politics are a powerful force, capable of shaping legitimacy. Through the 2016-17 Jakarta Gubernatorial Election, religion functioned simultaneously as a tool of delegitimisation and legitimisation, enabled by its capacity to provide ontological security and mobilise emotive appeal. Ahok's delegitimisation illustrates how sacralisation of identity can turn political contestation into existential threat to religious order. At the same time, the success of rival candidates demonstrates how religion can stabilise political uncertainty by offering moral reassurance and symbolic safety. Ultimately, this case highlights that the political power of religion in Indonesia is not purely theological, but institutionally and emotionally sustained in the public. These dynamics highlight the strategic power of religion in shaping political behaviour, and offer insight into how democratic competition can be driven by shared moral narratives as much as by governing capabilities. Understanding how religious beliefs shape politics contributes to a more just political order, one that prioritises responsibility and action over moral absolutism while still recognising the ethical contributions of religion.

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Rethinking the Role of Religion in International Relations: Ontological Security Theory and Its Limitations

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Abstract

This paper explores how religious belief affects political action through a critique of Kinvall's ontological security framework. Whilst Kinvall suggests that religious beliefs become salient in politics in response to uncertainty, I argue that her theory treats religion as epiphenomenal. Drawing on Asad, Scott, and MacIntyre, I argue that religion cannot be separated from the interpretative frameworks through which individuals understand the world. By examining the case of Haredi Jews and their opposition to Zionism, I assert that religion is the framework through which uncertainty itself is understood and through which legitimate political action is defined. This paper contributes to the study of politics by showing that, despite positive progress, existing scholarship on the role of religion in IR is constrained by conceptual limitations.

Introduction

Prior to the 1990s, religion was largely ignored by scholars of international relations (IR) (Mandaville 2019, p. 173), partly due to the belief that religion's importance would decline with global modernisation and secularisation (Scott 2005, p. 2). Yet, following events such as the Iranian Revolution and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which had clear religious dimensions, attention to religion's role in global politics has increased. In this essay I critically examine one influential theory that offers a reappraisal of religion's role in IR, namely Kinvall's (2004) ontological security approach. Kinvall suggests that globalisation increases ontological insecurity, which leads individuals to mobilise behind politicised religious groups that provide identity, meaning and continuity.

I argue that whilst Kinvall's theory takes a step in the right direction in acknowledging the importance of religion, the theory treats religion as instrumental and reactionary. It thus perpetuates the same Western assumptions about linear modernisation and a clear separation between religion and politics that limited understandings of religion within traditional IR theories. Through the case study of Haredi Judaism and its opposition to Zionism, I show the limitations of Kinvall's theory in explaining how religion becomes politicised for actors that already hold beliefs. I argue that for these types of actors, religious belief does not just enter politics as a reaction to existential anxiety, rather it fundamentally defines how they perceive the world and what political action is legitimate. I contend that religion cannot be instrumentalised to counter an independent, universal sense of ontological insecurity, as religion dictates how these individuals interpret and feel that insecurity in the first place.

To make this argument, the essay will be structured as follows: In Section I, I outline the concept of ontological security and its relevance to Kinvall's theory. In Section II, I build on the work of Asad (1993), Scott (2005) and MacIntyre (in Scott 2005) to develop a theoretical critique of Kinvall, highlighting the Western assumptions embedded in her theory. In Section III, using the case study of

Haredi Judaism and Zionism, I offer an empirical example that demonstrates how the theory's implicit assumptions limit its explanatory power of how religion affects politics for actors with pre-existing beliefs. I suggest religion is more fundamentally constitutive of political action than Kinvall suggests.

Section I: Ontological Security and Religion

This section will expand on the concept of ontological security and Kinvall's theory of the influence of religion on politics.

Ontological security is a sense of security in one's identity: a sense that one's life has continuity, and that one's actions align with a coherent set of inner values. It is fostered by factors such as routines, a clear place in a community, and predictability in day-to-day life. Ontological insecurity, by contrast, arises when this stability is interrupted. It leaves individuals unsure of their identity, unsure of what actions are meaningful, and unable to make predictions about the world around them (Mitzen 2006, pp. 342-345).

Kinvall (2004, p. 743) argues that globalisation increasingly undermines ontological security for many individuals worldwide by removing a sense of stability and predictability from their lives. For example, it spreads foreign ideas, such as democracy and neoliberalism, which disrupt deeply entrenched traditions and social practices worldwide. Similarly, it creates an increasingly interconnected world, which enables greater migration. However, many migrants can experience a sense of homelessness and unfamiliarity, which can also increase feelings of ontological insecurity.

As insecurity increases, Kinvall asserts that individuals 'search for one stable identity' (2004, p. 749) to provide meaning and an end towards which they can act. She argues that religious identities are one identity signifier that people are drawn to as they provide simple answers in an increasingly complex world, and since they promulgate clear, divinely ordained rules that provide individuals with a sense of order and meaning (2004, p. 759). For those that already follow a faith, Kinvall suggests religion is 'reinvented and reconceptualised' (2004, p. 760). Thus, for Kinvall, religious beliefs affect politics in that believers mobilise them in the face of psychological adversity.

Section II: Conceptual Critique

In this section, drawing on Asad, Scott and MacIntyre, I will offer a conceptual critique of Kinvall's theory.

Various scholars reject the idea of religion being an objective, analytically identifiable category, arguing that this distinction is a product of Eurocentric worldviews. In Western social science, theorisation about religion was largely based on Christianity, which, in comparison to other traditions, very explicitly differentiates between religion and politics. Over time, this distinction has come to be regarded as a universal feature of religion (Mandaville 2019, p. 173). Similarly, the rise of positivism in Western social science, an approach that assumes the existence of an objective social world, enabled the creation of distinct social categories, such as religion (Scott 2005, pp. 60-62). From this perspective, religion can be treated as an entity that is analysable independently of the moral and cultural frameworks in which it exists. For this reason, Asad (1993, pp. 17-18) argues that there is no such thing as religion as a separate category from politics and science. Similarly, Fitzgerald (2011, p. 6) argues that the category of religion does not describe the world but rather constitutes it. Kinvall reproduces this distinction between religion and other domains, as by suggesting that religion becomes politicised and salient after individuals experience ontological insecurity, she assumes religion can be analysed and experienced independently of the interpretive frameworks through which individuals perceive the world. She thus fails to recognise that religion cannot be divorced from feelings of insecurity, and that it frames what is even understood as uncertain from the offset.

Similarly, Scott (2005, pp. 51-52) argues that IR's attitude towards religion partly reflects the enduring influence of modernisation theory in Western social sciences. This theory suggests that all societies follow a linear pathway from backwards to modern, with secularisation being a central feature of this progress. Secularisation holds that as a society modernises, the importance of religion will inevitably decline. As a result of the theory's influence, any presence of religion in contemporary politics is often regarded as something that needs to be explained, as something that must be a result of other 'social, political, economic or psychological' forces (Bellah 1991, p. 241). Whilst Kinvall does not endorse modernisation theory, her effort to explain politicised religion with reference to other psychological deprivations reflects how her ideas are formed within an academic tradition heavily influenced by the theory. Her theory thus overlooks how religious beliefs can act as independent drivers of political action and thought in and of themselves.

My final critique of Kinvall's argument builds on MacIntyre. MacIntyre argues that, whilst constructivist positions do give greater recognition to religion in politics, their conception of how this occurs is still grounded in Western assumptions regarding individualism (in Scott 2005, p. 96). Constructivist theories suggest that people construct religious identities through symbols and discourse. Similarly, Kinvall (2004, p. 748), suggests that religious identities are constructed in response to ontological insecurity through symbols like historical trauma. This assumes that individuals are highly autonomous agents who can step outside of their spiritual heritage to choose their religious identity, an idea that reflects Western assumptions about the self-reliance and primacy of the individual. As Scott (2005, p. 75) puts it, religion becomes like a menu that actors appropriate when needed. Yet, as the case study of Haredi Judaism will show, individuals are inextricably anchored to and bound by their own belief systems. This means that they do not just calculatingly appropriate religion in light of psychological issues, rather religion fundamentally determines how they perceive those issues and what political action they take to alleviate them.

By treating religion as separable from other domains, reactionary, and contingent on individual choice, Kinvall takes a narrow view of how religion becomes politicised for already religious actors – viewing it as a secondary force that is reinvented in the face of anxiety. Yet religion does not just respond to anxiety – it determines what issues cause anxiety in the first place. It dictates what events matter, how those events should be interpreted, and what political action can be taken in response. Haredi Judaism's rejection of Zionism illustrates this idea.

Section III: Haredi Jews and Zionism

For Haredi Jews, conditions and events that might generate ontological uncertainty – diasporic existence and the Holocaust – are interpreted through their religious framework. Thus, despite Zionism representing an ideology that Kinvall's framework suggests would be an attractive source of stability, this group vehemently opposes it.

Various Haredi groups, such as Satmar and Neturei Karta, oppose the state of Israel (Klein 2023), despite living in conditions that seem highly conducive to ontological insecurity. One factor that might create insecurity is the fact that they are a diasporic population, with Jews belonging to these groups being spread as far and wide as the USA, Hungary and France (Keren-Kratz 2023, pp. 58-59). As noted earlier, Kinvall (2004, p. 743) suggests that a sense of rootlessness and homelessness makes it difficult for one's life to feel stable and predictable and thus suggests that these feelings are likely to cause ontological uncertainty. Undoubtedly, diasporic existence is likely to involve these feelings, in that these are populations living as minorities, ruled by leaders that are not of their own tribe, and surrounded by a range of very different cultures to their own. Indeed, Innes (2017, p. 357) asserts that diasporic populations do not have the simple nationalist narrative about their identity that comes with living in an indigenous state and thus suffer from ontological uncertainty. Another factor that is conducive to ontological uncertainty is traditional community ties (Giddens 1991, p. 33). Traditional communities present individuals with predictability and offer them the opportunity to construct their identity around membership of the group. Kinvall (2004, p. 743) notes that globalisation's destructive potential in part derives from how it destroys traditional community ties. Living through the Holocaust, the earliest members of the official Haredi anti-Zionist movement had their communities not just undermined, but systematically eradicated. For instance, Rabbi Yoel Tietelbaum, the eventual founder of the Central Rabbinical Congress, an early American anti-Zionist organisation, was the only Hungarian Ultra-Orthodox leader to survive the Holocaust (Keren-Kratz 2023, p. 59).

From the perspective of ontological security theory, Zionism would be an extremely attractive ideology for these Haredi Jews. As a form of religious nationalism, it provides a coherent connection between identity, territory and a stable home. The ideology is also closely connected to the 'othering' of Palestinian Arabs (Grassiani 2015), which would allow these Jews to intersubjectively construct their identity by distinguishing themselves from this unfamiliar group (Kinvall 2004, p. 749). Yet instead of being drawn to Zionism, Haredi Jews are staunchly opposed to the ideology, which is in large part due to their theological beliefs. According to the Talmudic verse 'The Three Oaths', Jews are not meant to 'hasten the redemption' and bring about Jewish sovereignty before the Messianic age. This means that Jews are to remain in exile from Israel, even under harsh conditions (Keren Kratz 2023, pp. 54-5).

This example highlights the limitations of Kinvall's theory in understanding how religion affects politics for already-religious actors. The Haredi Jews are not individuals who, free from the constraints of their religious beliefs, feel an abstract, universal sense of ontological uncertainty, and then calculatingly appropriate Zionist ideology in response to their conditions. Rather, any uncertainty they feel is understood with reference to their religious worldview. Religion is not a distinct category for them, separate from their emotional and interpretive frameworks; it is the framework. For example, diasporic existence does not cause existential anxiety for the Haredi Jews, because it is viewed as divinely ordained. Similarly, Rabbi Tietelbaum saw the Holocaust not as a source of existential anxiety, but rather as a divine punishment for the Zionist movement's disobedience of God's commands (Keren Kratz 2023, p. 61). This shows that religious beliefs do not just affect politics by entering in response to external pressures and deprivations, rather that they provide the entire framework within which political judgement and activity take place.

Conclusion

In this essay I have argued that religion does not become politicised when existing believers reinvent their faith in response to external issues. Instead, beliefs affect politics in that they offer comprehensive guidelines for political judgement and behaviour. I made this argument using the case study of Haredi Judaism's opposition to Zionism. Despite facing ostensibly uncertain conditions (from the perspective of Kinvall's theory) this religious group does not appropriate the convenient and stabilising Zionist ideology. Rather, religion structures how they perceive the anxiety in the first place and thus informs their subsequent oppositional political position.

In making this argument, I critiqued Kinvall's ontological security theory, which looks to explain how religion gains significance in politics. The aim of this critique is not to suggest her theory is devoid of any utility. It has, for instance, proven useful in explaining why Western born youths with more secular identities are drawn to ISIS (Ben Labidi 2016). But in theorising based on a Western conception of religion, the theory's explanatory power is limited when asking why religion becomes politicised for individuals for whom faith is already an important part of their lives.

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